The SOund PROJECTOR

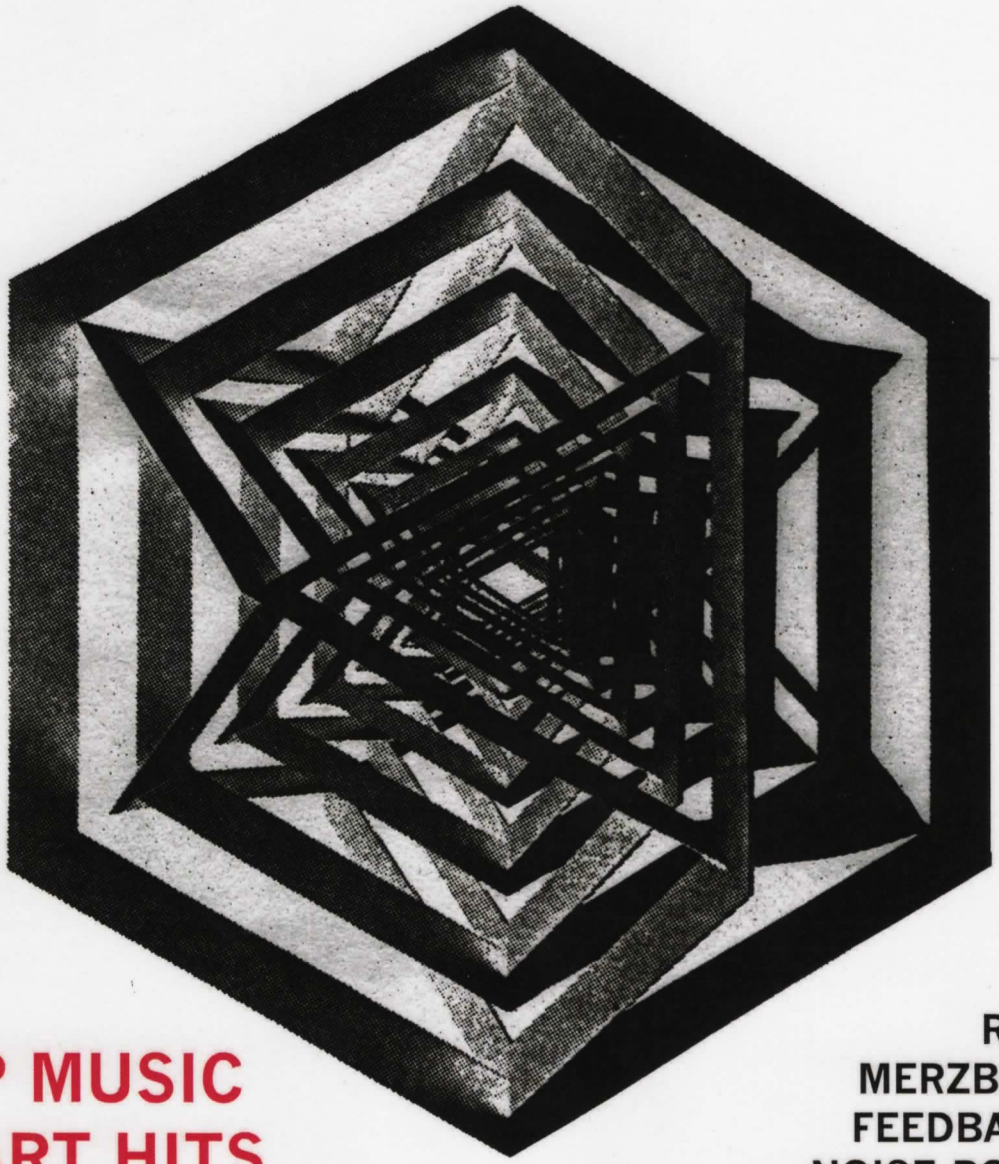
EDWARD RUCHALSKI
THE VITAMIN B12
RHODRI DAVIES
MURMER
RONNIE SUNDIN
MY CAT IS AN ALIEN

13

MUSIC MAGAZINE THIRTEENTH ISSUE 2005

THE SOUND PROJECTOR

A HEXAGONAL CONUNDRUM



POP MUSIC
CHART HITS
The MONKEES
Brian Wilson's SMILE

RLW
MERZBOW
FEEDBACK
NOISE-ROCK
BLACK METAL
NOISES FROM THE USA
SUBLIME FREQUENCIES

The Sound Projector 13th Issue

"A HEXAGONAL CONUNDRUM" Published January 2005

ED PINSENT
THE SOUND PROJECTOR
BM BEMUSED
LONDON WC1N 3XX
UNITED KINGDOM
ed@soundprojector.demon.co.uk
www.thesoundprojector.com

CREDITS

EDITOR and MAIN WRITER: Ed Pinsent

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Jennifer Hor
Aaron Robertson
Harley Richardson
Jonathan Hellier
Steve Bynghall
Janson Harrison
Richard Rees Jones
Chris Atton
Laura Wilson

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS
Anla Courtis, Ronnie Sundin, Harley Richardson
Drawings mostly by EP, who also did front and back covers. Images in interview sections supplied by the artists themselves.

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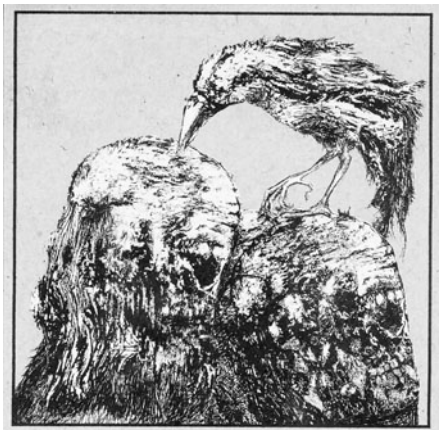
The Lamenting Octopus

Tells you all about other CDs also received into his welcoming tentacles this season...

Jean-Marc Foussat (interviewed last ish) is the great Algerian musician who made *Abbatage*, and I gather he still has CDRs of it available for sale. (jm.foussat@free.fr) He also sent me two CDs by his band Marteau Rouge, both fairly fine – more of a 'rock' combo thing but with added wild VCS3 synth stylings from Foussat you know you're in for a good time! Also one by Thrash The Flash, his other side project with Marc Dufour. ✚✚✚✚ **John Butcher** has a solo sax CD called *13 Friendly Numbers* on the Dutch Unsounds label. As I recall he's on great form here. Saw him play live on three occasions in 2004. On same label is a fairly credible comp of modern electronica called *Kraakgeluiden*. Mostly Dutch folk here, but I noticed Richard Barrett (UK composer / improviser) on here also. Could be really good. ✚✚✚✚ **99 Hooker's** *Generica* is crazy US improv, including Donald Miller on guitar. Seems fair but a bit all over the place. ✚✚✚✚ **Wobbly** (ie **Jon Leidecker**) sent me three CDs from San Francisco, including *Live 99>00* on the Phthalo label; exhausting, hyper-edited violent sampling; made me sick! On *Wild Why* he samples a lot of hip-hop records played on the radio in San Francisco. Unbelievably, all the lyrics he's cut up have been transcribed on the sleeve. It's overwhelming. *Wide Open Spaces* is one he made with Matmos and People Like Us; this is a live 2002 recording with a 'cowboy' theme. In his parcel came a note saying 'Hello there – enjoying the Sound Projector. You are all insane'. That's putting it mildly, Jon! ✚✚✚✚ **Steve Roden** gave me a batch of CDs in Dundee, where he had been playing (10/2003). One of them he plays a Harry Bertoia chair. *Winter Couplet* uses small tea cups as a sound source. Very Zen. *Ie chemin du paradis* is one he made with Francisco López. Two of the quietest musicians in the world on one CD! Haven't heard it yet, if you'll pardon the expression... ✚✚✚✚ Also there's a new one by **López** on the Antifrost label, called *Untitled #150*. Could be great stuff. ✚✚✚✚ **Tom Johnson** is a second-division American Minimalist guy; his *Nine Bells* LP on India Navigation is a pretty good one. but rare. The Italian label ANTS sent me *organ and silence*, which looks promising but it won't play in my machine. *Kientzy Plays Johnson* features compositions by TJ played by Daniel Kientzy on his saxophones. That's on Pogus Productions... ✚✚✚✚ **Projector Records** of London SE21 sent another compilation, this one called *The Trolley*. Tracks by Noakes Pressue, Cabin 33, Hard SK, Yimkin and Volunteer. Witty samples and beats. Same bands appear on another comp from same label *Know Your Monkey* – haven't heard this one. ✚✚✚✚ Another weird one from the Norwegian Humbug label. All I can tell you it's catalogue number 021. The remaining information is incomprehensible. It might be called **id m theft able**. Comes in an impressive package – nice acetate sleeve wrapped round a sleeve of textured material. Includes a bonus 5" vinyl record! Unfortunately the music is utterly unlistenable, half-assed garbage. ✚✚✚✚ **Stereo Muthafucuz** have about the worst name for a band I've heard in my life, but their record's pretty good as I recall...they're from Oakland, call themselves a noise rock band, and the record is a CDR and 7" lathe-cut single in a screen printed hand-cut cover. Nice picture of a scorpion. Don't know how you can get this, it's very limited. ✚✚✚✚ **Nobuo Yamada** made a CD called *Empty Time of TNB*. Seems to be another New Blockaders thing, though not sent here by Anomali. Don't know what to make of it. ✚✚✚✚ **Black Crack Revue** still going strong; we interviewed the splendid Revd Dwight Frizzell in issue 8. This later stuff of theirs is not to our taste unfortunately, but the new CD is called *Speck Of Dust*, and it's on the Sparkling Beatnik Records label. They describe BCR as 'AfroNuclearWavabillyFunkSwinfReggaeTurksaBand.' ✚✚✚✚ Big hello to **Sir Charles Bascomb** aka Silver Bullet in Leeds and thanks for all his letters. As the main man behind **Bongoleeros** he sent me a live split CDR they made with a Dutch band called Fcknbstrds. Incredible sleeve to this one. Recommended insane popular-noise song. They're also on another live split CDR called *Creeping Crawling Screams of Undertaker*, with a Hammer Horror styled sleeve. Some of this music beggars belief. ✚✚✚✚ **z-e-l-l-e** have a CD of incredibly minimal electronica on a Japanese label Cubifabric, from 2003. Wish I could bring myself to say something about it. It's called *rjctd::nw*. It makes Ryoji Ikeda sound like Bruce Springsteen. ✚✚✚✚ **Ceramic Hobs** used to be exclusive purview of War Arrow. Their new CD *Shergar Is Home Safe And Well* was sent to me direct by the man Stan Batcow of the PUMF label. Only a few tracks were enough to convince me this isn't quite in my line. It's exactly as if VIZ Comic were written by Mad Pride. ✚✚✚✚ **John Bisset's** *Smithy* is another great one on the 2:13 label. See Rhodri Davies interview for the story behind this informal 'series' of CDs. He's gone 'Onkyo' in a big way here...although in places it's more like a very English verison of John Fahey! ✚✚✚✚ **Michael Thomas Jackson** is a North Carolina composer who sent a double CDR of live electro-acoustic music called *Three Inlets*, which sounded genuinely interesting but once again it wouldn't play. I emailed him but he said I had to complete the 'burning' process myself, which seems a little odd. Let me know if you fare any better. (emptyj4@hotmail.com) ✚✚✚✚ **Mark Wastell and Graham Halliwell** made a record called *Faktura* (ABSURD #34 CD) and it was performed in October 2002 by Wastell on live electronics, Halliwell on feedback saxophone. *Faktura* is very quiet indeed. So quiet, in fact, that I've nothing more to tell you about it. And how was YOUR week? (EP)

ATOMS OF PURE ◆◆◆N-O-I-S-E◆◆◆



Wolf Eyes
Burned Mind
USA SUB POP RECORDS SPCD 638 (2004)

As this is their first release for Sub Pop (which therefore enables their music to reach a wider audience), it's natural I suppose for Michigan boys Wolf Eyes to make *Burned Mind* an unequivocal mission statement: We're a noise band! (Noise as in Merzbow-style noise.) And an uncompromising noise band at that! Conveniently this should lift Sub Pop's reputation among the indie/alt-rock college student target audience, the Seattle-based label having been somewhat at sea since the demise of grunge. The music is pretty angry and aggressive all the way through apart from a few moments at the beginning when the musicians are clanking around in the background. Coming from industrial sunset state Michigan, Wolf Eyes have reason to be angry and aggressive. But the band also remembers to keep its attention focussed on more obviously musical elements like rhythm, atmosphere, and the dynamics of the sounds and samples they use. The result is a finely honed monster machine, tough and gritty with distorted screaming vocals, that compares well with much of the output of past noise and industrial bands; heck, this CD is better than Whitehouse's last two albums, *Cruise* and *Birdseed*.

From start to finish, this is one incredible noise/industrial record, an indictment if you like of how successive US governments have worked together with corporations to sell US manufacturing and US workers down the river so that the country is no longer able to manufacture anything much worth mentioning apart from commercial jumbo jets and armaments. Unless you think putting together Mexican-made motors with Mexican-made car chassis and Mexican-made components using Mexican immigrant labour is something Americans should be proud of. Even flipping hamburgers is now classified as a 'manufacturing' activity. And get this - French fries, oops, freedom fries are classified as 'vegetables' thanks to a recent legal suit. Enough of this blather however, I got carried away there - well, don't be put off by the rather unpleasant front cover art or alarming track titles like 'Black Vomit' or even the fact that the CD is on Sub Pop and not Hanson anymore - this is one record you must buy, or you'll surely cry.

JENNIFER HOR
www.subpop.com

Autodigest
A Compressed History of Everything Ever Recorded, Vol. 1
PORTUGAL CRÓNICA 006 CD (2003)

What a title, eh? What kind of recorded music could possibly live up to it? The ambitions of this recording are not only hinted at in that grandiose title, but are further elaborated in a deeply pretentious sleeve note. 'Aspires to a viral, everpresent omnipresence', the writer solemnly informs us. 'Autodigest arrives in the form of an encyclopaedia, an archaeological sound document time-travelling out of a post-digital-meltdown landscape.' What in the name of Stephen Hawking does that mean?

Despite such off-putting pseudo-intellectual garbage, the music herein is really pretty good. Autodigest's approach is simply to fragment everything he can get his hands on, and grind it into dust; through atomisation, he reaches into some new realm of digital madness. Of the 12 tracks here, most are experiments in a series titled 'Compression'. Only one is called an 'Expansion', a statistic which indicates he prefers the act of crushing to the act of building. Fear not however; it's not a huge stitch-together patchwork from familiar musical sources, like John Oswald and his Plunderphonics. Rather, it's mostly totally abstract digital noise. And what noise…vast cathedrals of nihilistic, oppressive din…nightmarish feelings are conveyed almost instantly. Events rush by at 1000 mph, suggesting information overload squeezed down a narrow digital pipe…ghastly bass throbs, utterly unmusical, underpin everything in this crazy-house architecture, while liberal use of digital echo delineates enormous spaces. Good, massy and weighty sound art; delivered with dynamics which are often-times quite remarkable. I hate remix culture, but this goes beyond the rim of remixing and moves into another totally horrifying space.

I'm not inclined to find out any more about this guy. Printed credits simply read 'Written and composed by everyone' but 'Mixed, compressed and expanded by Autodigest'. It's my guess that he's trying to pack as much substance as he possibly can into concentrated lumps of poisonous boiled sweets, like Spangles laced with arsenic. The internal mock-triptych image inside is particularly sardonic; there's a priest at high mass, hands raised, about to consecrate the sacred host. But his eyes are hidden by a superimposed black shape which contains a stained glass window. This image is flanked by two rag dolls, so scrappy that even Mike Kelley would reject them, more like something from primitive, rural witchcraft. In all, a fairly singular statement, startling, alarming and quite subversive in intent; it drives another nail into the coffin of Western civilisation.

ED PINSENT 09/10/2004
www.cronicaelectronica.org
Rua Miguel Bombarda 457, 405-382 Porto, Portugal
www.materiaprima.net

Dustbreeders and Junko
Mommy Close The Door
USA STARLIGHT FURNITURE CO ★22 CD (2004)

Perhaps surprisingly given the discography of this US label, here's a record of chaotic, shrieking noise. Three live cuts, all recorded

in venues in France in 2002. Junko is the famed screaming woman who, since escaping the reign of terror of Japnoise-combo Hijokaidan, is currently finding her niche in world of avant-noise with her alarming high-pitched wails and shrieks. The Dustbreeders-related label (Elevage de Poussiere) thought fit to unleash an entire LP of her solo screams, the singular *Sleeping Beauty* which we reviewed last ish. Junko's solo screech, both monotonous and irritating, can be an acquired taste; it doesn't hurt to hear her 'work' leavened by a good piece of backing music, as is the case here with French trio Dustbreeders. For another approach, see the Pinknoise CD she made with Mattin.

Dustbreeders are three French fellows, intent on putting up a 'rannygazoo' on the whole world with their finely-honed, loose-limbed brand o'racket. They answer to names of Yves Botz, Thierry Delles and Michel Henritzi, latter being label boss for A Bruit Secret. The trio formed in the late 1980s, sharing the concept of 'anti-records'. Eschewing conventional technique, they opted for mechanical devices as chosen instrumentation; for example they yield 'mange-disques' along with their nasty effect pedals and loud amplifiers. Sounds like a mange-disque could be a useful tool, a device that eats records…I'll have to order several for my home. (NB – this turns out simply to be a portable slot-in record player from the 1970s). If you're hungry for an equivalent to the free-form wildness of Japanese noise of yore, you might be disappointed by Dustbreeders, who are quieter; but if seeking a solid, viable alternative approach then you'll find their brand of electrified bruit is excellent. It reveals, after some careful listening, a certain intellectual deliberation in its many-layered structures of clattering and whooping. Think of a souped-up version of what Jérôme Noetinger and Lionel Marchetti frequently do, but with more balls than those two sissies can manage.

Extra dimensions of meaning are added to this record by the sumptuous sleeve photos; rare to find a case these days where the visual component so perfectly complements the sonic. In these snaps, figures performing on stage are rendered as columns of shapeless charred meat; lit by lurid red lights, they also resemble demons writhing in Hades. The amplifier set-up looks like cities about to be devastated by their onslaught. On the back cover a crucifix motif is suggested by juxtaposed elements, while front cover clearly shows a scowling skull on someone's leather jacket. Get the idea? Inside tray shows aftermath of this CD's 'scorched earth policy'…red embers glowing, remnants of furniture, broken equipment. Let this happen to your living room…let Dustbreeders and Junko inside then, Mommy, close the door!

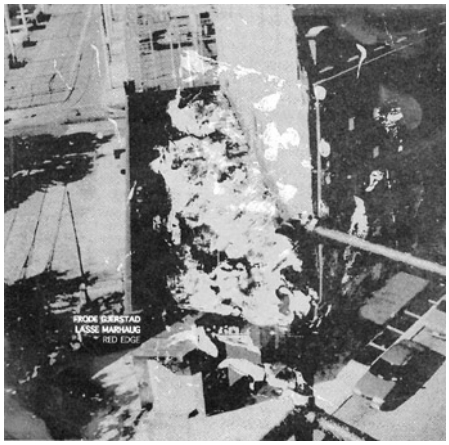
ED PINSENT 04/10/2004
PO Box 424762, San Francisco, CA 94142, USA
www.midheaven.com

Space Machine
3
USA IMPORTANT RECORDS IMPREC026 CD (2003?)

Since Merzbow left a job vacancy in analog / tape music some years ago, fellow Nipponese noise nabob Maso Yamazaki has attempted to fill this niche with his Space Machine analog synth / tape recorder project. Allow me to say right now that this CD (Space Machine's 3rd release in case you haven't already guessed) is something along the line of 'In space, absolutely NO-ONE can hear Masonna scream' as this music is mostly repetitive loops of 1950s / 60s B-grade sci-fi movie soundtrack bleeps, groans and gloops with little direction or structure apart from what the sounds themselves suggest. This would be fine if the CD were short and consisted of just one track in which all the sound loops could bleed into one another to create some kind of amorphous, organic psychedelic ecosystem - that really would be something worth hearing. Unfortunately, the CD is very long: there is a live piece lasting about 40 minutes and the 6 studio pieces are fairly generic borderline kitsch, following one another in a stately manner as surely as the sun rises and the cock crows automatically. Only tracks 5 and 6 seem to offer more than the standard parade of exotic spacey noises with some attempt at a definite, intuitive structuring of noises and a gloopy atmosphere on the latter track.

On the live piece, Yamazaki is joined by Kouichi Nakaya on synths, theremin and echo machine, and by Makoto Kawabata who forsakes his customary guitar pyrotechnics displays to add discreet guitar touches and reverb around the music. This slab of music could have been hived off onto a separate disc and issued as a separate release (I hear this CD is a reissue of a double vinyl set released some years ago) with 'tracks' created out of it to allow for coffee breaks, toilet breaks and such-like. While the whole original shebang was probably something to behold – there may have been a light show on at the time and everyone would have been slack-jawed just to see Yamazaki and Kawabata standing or sitting still for once in their lives - on CD, the music isn't strong enough to hold your attention for long. Maybe this whole live set should have been filmed and released on DVD or video, as there's something about the music (the lack of direction or overall concept shall we say) that's saying 'background music' to me.

JENNIFER HOR
www.ImportantRecords.com
www.yamazaki-maso.net



Frode Gjerstad / Lasse Marhaug
Red Edge
BREATHMINT RECORDS BM96 / CARBON RECORDS CR92 / GAMEBOY RECORDS GB55 / LITTLE MAFIA RECORDS LM035 / SUNSHIP RECORDS SUN38 CD (2004)

Strong and lively improvised jazz noise – vital performances from this Nordic duo and a refreshing power-pack of energy, ready to be plugged into your bloodstream at any time and act faster than an injection of glucose laced with cocaine. Lasse Marhaug wheels out a tray of electronic devices and creates sympathetic, varied backdrops of grinding racket for the blurtish saxophone workings of Frode Gjerstad; working like demons, they laid down all the cuts in a single frantic session in November 2002. Frode's a veteran free honker with 40 years of history under his belt; he's blurted, blown and blasted with Evan Parker, Peter Brötzmann, William Parker, John Stevens (in the group Detail), Paul Rutherford and Sabeer Mateen. He kicks off here with manic, free-sax blurts on 'A Dry Well'; might be said to emulate the spirit of 1960s free jazz recordings, with this wildly squawking sax noise and a rumbling percussive rattle from Lasse that sounds like a troupe of fevered rats trapped inside a snare drum. If

this is a virtual Archie Shepp with a virtual Sonny Murray, then 'Red Edge' (title track) is more like Evan Parker pitted against a spastic version of Terry Riley. The clarinet meanders in insistent loops, while the electronic component is shapeless, nagging ditherings, everything filled with nervous energy and a strange intensity.

Those openers, though noisy, are at least inspired by a fairly joyous and celebratory mood. By the time we get to 'Falling Down', players have entered a much darker realm of respective psyches. Lasse has tuned into a mean, bass-rumbling groaning effect, while Frode's bass clarinet is clearly in a foul mood…together they frown and grumble about the state of the world, muttering oaths against deficiencies of modern society. This is Eric Dolphy's evil twin, finding himself confronted by a malfunctioning washing machine. Then for 'The First Rule', the musical dialogue has developed into incomprehensible babbling…a battle of matched tooters, with Lasse on repeat play and Frode making his horn squeak like an inflated hamster. As these car-horn sounds battle it out, one is reminded of the length traffic-jam sequence in Godard's *Weekend*. Things grow scarier and scarier…the end of civilisation may well be nigh. More records should be this direct! Any record with 'red' in the title usually deserves a closer look, and the abstract red splotches on cover would make a good alternative for the King Crimson LP of this name…and this CD is so good it has four catalogue numbers, thereby enormously increasing your chances of obtaining a copy. Plus it's a Thurston Moore favourite, which is quite an endorsement.

ED PINSENT 25/09/2004
www.breathmint.net
www.carbonbrecords.com
www.gmby.net
www.littlemafia.com
www.freenoise.org

Opaque
New Ways to Criticise
UNITED KINGDOM 8M 006 / CONSUME CON 008 CD (2003)

Another surprisingly good obscurity and a great guitar-noise fest here. A pair of colourful guitar-manglers are involved, which their cognomens are Lea Cummings and Murray Johnston, and which they seem to be based in Glasgow. In fact, proportionally speaking, 'guitar-noise' doesn't adequately describe what they produce, nor comprehensively cover the range of sonic activities these lively improvisers are dealing in…'new extreme sonic territories' is where they claim to be 'pushing their sound', and the sensation conveyed by said sounds is indeed one of 'pushing' around a one-ton weight from one side of warehouse to another. (That's how it feels, not how it sounds). And you too as listener will be 'pushed' out of your own front door by the sheer massiveness of these recordings.

The first few cuts point to much exertion expended and much sweat caused to

flow…so far so good. Every moment seems to be swelling with anger and complex emotions of tension, hatred, blocked feelings and tooth-grinding angst of some sort. This catalogue of unruly sensations matches the feral guitar and feedback attacks, and the slow doomy chime and groaning episodes. Whichever mode they choose, each track has an electrifying atmosphere so sharp and palpable you could slice it up with a butcher's carving knife and bake it in a pie.

The 'lads' don't lack for a sense of humour; they might be aiming, with some of their elaborate track titles, to out-do Keiji Haino in terms of word-count and obscurity of reference. 'The No-Nonsense Blood Smeared Pyjamas' is one Dadaist favourite; said title graces an odd track that's a good respite from the grungy racket, showcasing strangely random plucking patterns. 'My Host Must have wondered why they'd asked for an expert and been sent this Hooligan instead' includes a horrendous primitive drum-machine, deployed in fashion to resemble the hungover memory of last night's clubbing…a real hammering to the bonce. As CD proceeds, it's clear this bunch would be pretty lost without their effects pedals, but there is still evidence of real effort in their strenuous attempts to lock together and form an improvisational duo.

That's excepting track 6, in which all attempts to communicate with audience completely collapse into a madhouse of clattering, feedback squawls, heavy black noise and frenzied soloing. Just fantastic, in other words! Seek out the work of this low-profile (no pictures of them are available) duo while ye may…copies disappearing fast, according to their website…

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004
http://opaque.8m.com
www.consume.freeserve.co.uk

Junko and Mattin
Pinknoise
SPAIN W.M.O/R 13 CD (2004)

Difficult, challenging noise. Who wants to hear the sound of a woman screaming? If you 'read' the content of this record in purely misogynistic terms, it's completely revolting. Junko, the Japanese torture victim, suffering under the instruments of Mattin, the Spaniard, acting as a Grand Inquisitor. As she screams, Junko appears to be writhing in agony under the relentless electronic device of the cruel Mattin. Yuk. A more positive slant might be to somehow empower the woman in this fiction. Perhaps she's not in pain at all, but instead a frustrated feminist railing against the constrictions of patriarchal society, only to be met with the monotonous indifference of the powers that be, as represented by Mattin's drones of futility.

On the other hand, if you hear this as plain non-associative abstract noise…well, in fact that's no better. It remains startling and incredibly severe. There's nothing frantic about it; not for this duo the empty flailings of most table-top noiseicians. Instead, *Pinknoise* locks its energy into a tight little ball of compressed anger, and lets it fester in the corporate bloated body of the modern world. You can practically feel this noise inculcating a cancer inside your own body, as you listen! If *Pinknoise* signifies anything as a title, surely it points to the age-old dilemma of human beings becoming dehumanised by machinery and technology, in a potent symbol for the never-ending struggle that constitutes our lives today.

Recorded in a Tokyo studio in 2004, and arrives issued in a pink clamshell case. This noise has a ghastly, teeth-clenching beauty; compared with Junko's performance with Dustbreeders (see above), this one is brutal; at least with Dustbreeders, you can lose yourself somewhere in the sprawling chaos of it all. Here, in this starkness, there's nowhere to hide. Even I can't bring myself to play the whole thing, and it's only 30 minutes long.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2004
www.mattin.org

Ryfylke
Boknafjord
NORWAY ROGGBIF RECORDS RR007 CD (2004)

Newcomers from the Norwegian sound-art realms, this comprises a duo of youngsters Stian Skagen and Sten Ove Toft. Only since Autumn 2003 have they been unleashing their brand of processed noise, with scattered live appearances in Oslo and sporadic recorded appearances on compilations, for example the *Cottage Industrial* comp from Humbug and the *NorNoise* comp supposedly forthcoming from OHM Records. When they're hard at work, the duo combine two basic approaches: Toft does it using field recordings, which he crunches up into a screwed-up ball of noise using processing, electronic tools, and old cassette players to distress basic surface. Skagen does it with pure feedback, making the most out of glitches and faults that arise from the process. Thus, a basic dichotomy between narrative and purely abstract elements is proposed; presumably they resolve their differences like gentlemen, and if a point of argument arises between them they will never resort to fisticuffs or fighting a duel with pistols at dawn.

Equally of interest is their choice of name for this release. The Boknafjord is a seaway in Norway, that leads the intrepid voyager to numerous fjords in Rogaland. The duo want to suggest that their music passes on a similar effect of 'presage'. I'm encouraged to find noise-makers so thoroughly attuned to the distinctive nature of their local environment, the very geography of their homeland. Where are all the equivalent English musicians who could be finding inspiration in the rolling Dorset hills, or the flats of Norfolk? A good belt of solid sound emerges from this *Boknafjord* CD' laying cards on table, they kick off with intensely harsh track, but a short one. This is followed with something more considered, a careful exploration of unknown territory. As music progresses, it does indeed manage to evoke the depth and majesty of the slow-moving ice floes one associates with the northerly climes. Something massive, cold, and darkly fascinating.

Overall it's a fine mix of approaches, with a ratio of about 40% strange drones and 60% harsh noise. It's a little lacking in real power, despite the high volume of the mastering; one senses a lack of stability behind the kinetic displays, as though they didn't adequately nail down the Catherine Wheel at fireworks display and it's spinning all over the garden. Some of what they do is in the Marhaug area – that feeling of foreign bodies flying around in the air, buffeting your head like pebbles. Their approach to making sound is extremely common nowadays; they can't seem to escape the confines of the digital realm, and the crackly 'top end' (familiar to any who listen to a lot of this stuff) remains their portion. They manage to transcend this limitation for a lot of the time, and are much fiercer than many digital 'glitchers' I've heard. Mostly, this record is spot on target, and the original field recordings (if any) have been rendered completely unrecognisable.

ED PINSENT 24/10/2004
www.rogbiff.com

Golden Serenades
The Golden Serenades II
USA GAMEBOY RECORDS GB53
CD-R (ND)

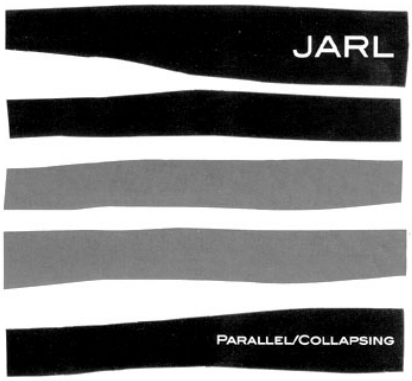
A duo of Norwegian noisesters here, one of which is the great John Hegre! He formed this combo in 1999 with fellow countryman Jorgen Traen. Well, it's a known fact that I'll probably accept just about any kind of noise-based record at this magazine with open arms and open ears, but this one fails to ignite the fireworks of passion for some reason. Which is inexplicable, because it's certainly hearty, loud, screechy and thumpy; many of the desirable ear-shredding attributes are here, in other words. Perhaps it lacks imagination; it certainly lacks structure. 40-plus minutes of continual tortured racket without dynamics or shape…just loud volume. In some ways it's getting to be a bit of a cliché. Package is good on the surface, with gold printing on a red card (like a Christmas card) but it conceals a layer of photocopied insert and another DIY CD-R effort. Already sold out at source.

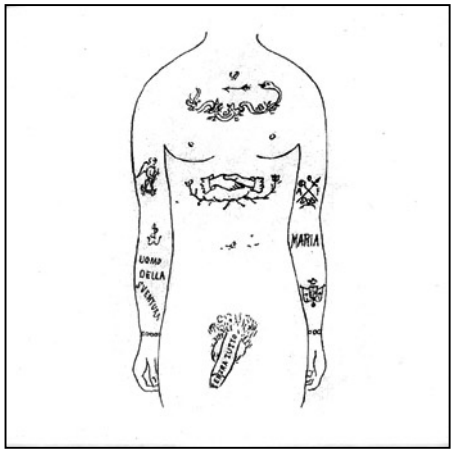
ED PINSENT 11/11/2004
PO Box 12132, Columbus, OH 43212. USA
www.gmby.net

Heliogabalus
Tourette is Normal (Excerpt 2)
SPAIN W.M.O/R 12 CDR (2004)

A highly entertaining 27-minute burst of insane, distorted malarkey-noise...primitive, wild and colourful lo-fi electronica and guitar work to revitalise the jaded palette. Imaginary wild guitar solos are being fed in real time through a digital mincer and relayered with mad organ attacks, falling at random into incoherent, strangely compelling shapes. What times we live in when, with the correct tools in his hands, it seems that any competent man may build for himself a music-box from Hell! Nothing much is known about this clown Heliogabalus, who filches his name from a genuine figure in Roman history and wraps this CDR in some splendid etching-like images of a cutaway view of head and a tattooed guy with a large penis, and with message inscribed on said penis...the cutaway head image suggests, with some accuracy, the damage that this hard-edged noise will wreak on your sensitive bonce. Any damage inflicted by tattooed penis, however, we take no responsibility for. Spaniard Mattin (whose label this graces) certainly manages to find some real eccentric characters out there...

ED PINSENT 18/09/2004
www.mattin.org





Jarl
Parallel / Collapsing
SWEDEN SEGERHUVA SEGER 9
CD (2003)

Erik Jarl uses whatever methods are at his disposal to build up HEAVY and complex droneworks, starting from very simple origins. You're in for an oscillating, slowly-progressing listening experience, crammed with lots of accreting layers to rock you slowly into nightmare-land; and the overall caste is gloomy and grim. Preferences go back and forth every time I play this one; not only is it monotonous, but stays more or less in same 'key' throughout, so that after even 25 minutes of play, any differences are barely noticeable. In its favour, it has a convincing sense of destruction and dismantling – hence the title, one may guess. A recent release on this Swedish specialist label, who've also issued recs by Government Alpha, Blod, and Sharon's Last Party. Jarl seems to be a side project of another obscure (and more extreme) noise thing called IRM, and this is intended as some form of 'ultimate' dark ambient, death industrial, experimental music. Well, I suppose if you play this CD and then shoot yourself in the head, this 'ultimate' intention could be realised.

ED PINSENT 30/09/2004
www.segerhuva.se

Blod
My Beloved Daughters
SWEDEN SEGERHUVA SEGER 6
CD (2004)

Looking for a good smack in the mouth, and you need it delivered fast? Here are 18 tracks of relentless noise in only 28 minutes. Composed and performed in the classic 'roar and screech' mode, Blod owe a huge debt to Merzbow and Masonna and wear their IOU pinned to their sleeve. About the most convincing release I've heard on the Segerhuva label so far; at least it delivers the 'extreme' qualities of which they vaguely boast. If you want to try catching an express train with your teeth, and need a bit of warm-up practice first, this is the CD for you.

There is a vaguely misogynistic streak to the

titles and cover art imagery. The front cover photograph, perhaps clipped from a magazine, shows a nameless blonde woman innocently answering the phone. The back cover is another girl sitting in the toilet, the image thankfully cropped to spare us too much detail. The track titles hint at degradation, kneeling, humiliation, period pains and menstrual blood. Inevitably, one title refers directly to male and female genitalia. It's only silly adolescent males who exhibit these preoccupations, wallowing in their own fear of female anatomy; it's dubious, and it's dated. Even Merzbow left this sort of imagery behind years ago. You also gotta wonder why it's 18 separate cuts; it appears to be one continuous noise episode, simply sliced into 18 parcels. Feedback, wah-wah roaring, hailstorms…a stream of information that isn't really information at all. Found this one pretty striking at first, but once you grow used to it, it's pretty boring.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2004
www.segerhuva.se

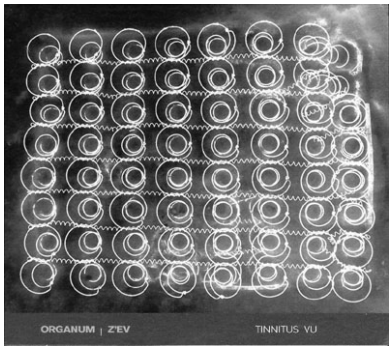
Daniel Menche
Skadha
GREECE ANTIFROST AFRO 2023 CD (2004)

Title is an old Norse word for 'scathe', and accordingly an image of hand clutching large battle-axe is only 'artwork' supplied with this otherwise naked disc; thus hinting that noise-yeoman Menche continues to bear grudge against the world and sees this astral globe of God's creation as an nothing more than an arena fit for him to unleash his droney throbbing noises and gradually numb the minds of populace. He does this gradually by degrees, starting off with fairly acceptable growling sounds which resemble fridge motors conking out; but things accumulate many layers, such that after some 10-12 minutes they have mutated into something nasty, grinding and relentless. Menche takes a simple idea and then allows it to soar into realms of excess…or, if you prefer, pounds it into the ground as it begs for mercy. The same basic trajectory of slow build-up and sudden cut-off is followed for each piece on this CD; is this the only conception he has of musical dynamics? This isn't a completely outstanding release in the already overcrowded world of noise records, and it's easy to get your fill of Menche's brand; but at least it's better than *Invoker*, his previous wimpish effort in this direction.

ED PINSENT 25/09/2004
www.antifrost.gr

Organum / Z'ev
Tinnitus VU
UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TONE 19 CD (2004)

Considering what a couple of 'mavericks' of the avant-garde these two are, this is a surprisingly ordinary bit of aural flotsam. Oh, it's noisy enough I suppose, and their compositions don't lack for force; plenty of



massy and weighty noises, filled with some form of 'powerful textural capability' (whatever that means), but it lacks purpose, direction, shape and meaning. Zev's description of this 'collaborative project' dwells mostly on the circumstances of his meeting David Jackman, telling us little of their artistic aspirations. Instead the story comes over like description of a cosy vicar's garden fete, which doesn't sit well with one's image of these 'dangerous' players. It is revealed that both Z'ev and Jackman suffer from varying forms of tinnitus, no doubt one of the perils of their extreme sonic occupations. They discussed their mutual medical problem and decided to turn it into the theme for this release. I suppose the music can convey – especially the heavy fog of the third track – what it's like to suffer with this unfortunate ear condition. It suggests, rather vaguely, a dense ringing in the ears or the feeling that your whole head is clogged up, wrapped in a blanket of snow. Or felt and animal fat, if you're Joseph Beuys. Noted with a passing interest that Robert Hampson's hand is credited with 'post-production mastering', which isn't to say he contributed anything to the sounds on disc, but made me realise I already miss Main and their decentred ambient drones. The only relief offered on this boring record is the piano chords which occasionally appear, sometimes spooled backward…otherwise this is a tedious, inessential and messy failed experiment.

ED PINSENT 02/10/2004
www.touchmusic.org.uk

Zbigniew Karkowski and Peter Rehberg
POP: Work Hard Play Harder
GREECE ABSURD #31 CD (2003)

Don't play this after a hard day's work; it will simply deal you a further body-blow and shatter your constitution. It's a strong blast of gloomy and bad-tempered electronic ranting from the hands and hearts of two of the biggest misanthropes who ever tortured a circuit to death! Pita Rehberg and Zbigniew Karkowski are the two scowling meanies who perpetrated this atrocity. They executed their sadistic death-dealing actions in one single day in November 2002, in Athens – since ancient times, an internationally-recognised Euro-centre of pain! Should you purchase this document of doom (or receive copy thro' mails, in plain brown wrapper), you'll be rewarded with an 'original' thematic statement and two treatments of same by each respective artiste, which is a bit like watching the same porno-snuff movie three times over, from 3 different angles (yuk!). This grisly description should alert you to possibility that this is one of the best things each have been associated with of late – more aggressive than Karkowski's usual slow-burn, grudge-holding diatribes, and more of a righteous stone-cold downer than Pita's twitch-and-jerk styled anti-dance music. As far as listening pleasure goes, it hits the 'overload' point quite quickly – cue sounds of jet airliners taking off and crashing simultaneously - and so kicks in like a good dose of formaldehyde coursing swiftly through every vein in your cadaver. Continual efforts are made to fuck up and distort the linearity of these 'compositions', and bring additional abrasiveness to the surface. Little short of monstrous; these men are sonic bullies.

ED PINSENT 02/10/2004
www.anet.gr/absurd/releases.htm

Deison / Marhaug
33 Minutes of your Life
ITALY LOUD! RECORDS L!CD04 CDR (2003)

Five topnotch tracks of near-noise on this LP-length CDR, limited edition. Deison Cristiano is an Italian, crossing rapiers with the fishing-rod of Norwegian maestro Lasse Marhaug. As this is called a 'constructed' record, the chances are they never met but instead exchanged soundfiles through the mails; a constructive and healthy way to make new friends. The finished product has a sketchy, random and messy feeling, which I like; each piece is loose around the edges, beginnings and ends are uncertain. This leaves space for the listener. You should be able to insinuate yourself in this alien nightclub, with its 25 patrons of which 12 are Martians, and groove away on those portions you see fit before making your getaway into the night air. Treat the CD as a smorgasbord of feedback, crackling, beeping, and rumbling, heaped onto canapés like so much expensive caviar. Not an especially wild and noisy package; instead, lots of density and action packed into every one of these 33 minutes, and all extremely palatable. 'Piano theme from nowhere', with its skipping record and generally ambiguous tone, could almost be a lost Philip Jeck track. 'Picture in a frame' is a splendid slow-burn rumble & wail, suggestive of a deep-sea fish equipped with its own Geiger counter as it negotiates seas polluted with nuclear fuel. Then there's 'Il tempo di una Notte', my personal fave, a superb nocturne which paints the blue-black night sky awash with stars, and filled with flying saucers causing radio static as they hover past; gorgeous sumptuous sounds here, an aural embracing of the demons of the night. On the final cut, bone-rattling dynamics abound, where the entire air is charged with near-tangible sounds, ear-piercing high notes. A highly imaginative and rewarding work of sound art.

ED PINSENT 26/10/2004
Via Cormons 33, 33100 Udine, Italy
crdeison@tin.it
www.deison.net

ROCK MUSIC

Sunn O)))
White2
USA SOUTHERN LORD SUNN31
CD (2004)

Superior to *White1* and sounding like it really means business, *White2* revels in taking the Sunn O))) drone concept to its farthest limit. The grand declaration of war sounds off in 'Hell-O)))-Ween', a series of monumental twisting-turning guitar riffs that would put 99% of the world's doom metal bands to shame, yet which manage to sound quite restrained and not all that scary. Funny how a slight change in the sound can make all the difference between a chilling, menacing atmosphere and a warmer ambience. The weather changes in 'bassAliens': the withdrawn guitar scrapings bring back the dark chilly feeling and the space surrounding the piece seems cold and damp. Guitar tones suggest raindrops and drones hint at mists and grey clouds drawing near; as the track progresses, choppy textures herald harsh winds and other disturbances in the atmosphere and beyond.

Good as these tracks are (though the second track is rather long for what it does), they are blown away by 'Decay2 [Nihil's Maw]', on which Sunn O))) men Greg Anderson and Stephen O'Malley lead their guest musicians including Rex Ritter, Joe Preston and Dawn Smithson through a bleak and windswept post-apocalyptic soundscape from which vocalist Attila Csihar (Mayhem / Plasma Pool / Aborym), like a prophet-shaman recently returned from a trip to the Underworld, emerges to utter desolate lyrics derived from the ancient Indian Vedas scriptures: they concern the Age of Kali / Kali-yuga whose worship of materialism, worldly success and superficiality is frighteningly the same as ours and whose decline and destruction surely portend our own Western civilisation's decay and death.

We're living in an age where capitalism increasingly unravels due to its logic and rationalism being taken to reductionist extremes, and where the Anglophone countries of the world are set to crash into the Third World and beyond (welcome!) through a combination of crippling trade deficits, mass over-consumption encouraged by global media corporations leading to crippling consumer debt, the erosion of social services and education by governments which forces people to use credit like privatised food stamps, and massive job losses due to corporate takeovers and job outsourcing to China and India the sweatshops of the planet. Csihar's droning guttural sermons, dry and unemotional and conveying the impassive nature of the Hindu gods, pack an almighty punch; the Sunn O))) ensemble is wise to provide minimal atmospheric backing only. Without a doubt, taking Csihar on board was a master-stroke on Sunn O)))'s part and one hopes he will continue as a semi-regular member of the band. (There has been talk I believe of Sunn O))) releasing a live album featuring Attila Csihar on vocals - would that such an idea were realised!)

The artwork on the album is not as good as on some other Southern Lord releases I have seen but the starkness and minimalism are in keeping with the recording's concept.

JENNIFER HOR
www.southernlord.com
www.ideologic.org
Lyrics to 'Decay2 [Nihil's Maw]',
www.ideologic.org/decay

Khanate
Things Viral
USA SOUTHERN LORD
SUNN28CD (2003)

At first I disliked Alan Dubin's relatively high-pitched vocals for this recording, Khanate's 2nd album, believing them unsuited for the deep doom metal style of the music but after several spins of the CD I have since come round to the view that Dubin's voice complement the sparse and stark arrangements well. Given that the music makes no allowance for riff patterns and melodies, a lead or rhythm guitarist isn't really needed so Dubin's voice provides the treble counterpoint for the instruments. However we here at TSP still love any band that includes man of the moment Stephen O'Malley - we'll have a bit more to say about him later.

Guitars, drums and bass - the usual heavy metal instruments of choice - combine with synths to emphasise the lyrics and push the tracks along. Unusually perhaps for a non-Japanese act, Khanate use space as a backdrop / element in the music to produce a sense of dread and unease. The guitar is also sometimes used to produce ambient effects. The expressionistic lyrics which admit no possibility of progress or relief and the stark nature of the music (nearly everything you hear is upfront) make for an intense listening experience. Some people will feel drained, even assaulted if that's the right term, by this music. Each track (there are 4 tracks in all, including 2 very long 19-minute pieces) is a psychological study of a severely disturbed mind; the last track in particular, 'Too Close Enough To Touch' has just enough word and phrase associations as indicated by the track title itself, and at the same time repeated and fragmented lyrics to suggest paranoid schizophrenia or something close to it. The tracks are not that distinct from one another due to Khanate's musical approach and narrow choice of subject matter and this may annoy some who prefer their songs to be internally consistent with definite rhythms, melodies and lyrics, but I find the whole CD coherent in concept.

With a recording such as this, you really need to consider the whole rather than its parts and to have an open mind to the musical and lyrical approach: there may be more ways to deliver a song than singing and to perform music than constantly playing the same motifs over and over, or even playing the instruments throughout. If anything, I'd prefer Khanate to lay on the psychological torture more thickly by having more screams and the odd growl or gurgle from Dubin (perhaps with more echoing effects) and making his vocals ebb and flow (so the listener feels nauseous), and to roughen up the music more, perhaps by distorting Dubin's vocals or using more guitar feedback.

One member of Khanate who may be familiar to TSP readers is bass / synth player James Plotkin who years ago led OLD (which also included Dubin) and was also associated with Mick Harris's industrial / heavy ambient dub project Scorn and Bill Yurkiewicz's noise band Namanax. And of course there's guitarist Stephen O'Malley who with his various music projects including SunnO))) and Lotus Eaters with Plotkin (and his graphic design work - O'Malley did the cover for Japanese band Boris's *Absolutego* CD which I reviewed a

few issues back and I think he's done album covers for Emperor and Cathedral), has been an extremely busy man of late. But of course - extreme people produce extreme music!

JENNIFER HOR
www.southernlord.com
www.ideologic.org

Sonic Youth
Sonic Nurse
UNITED KINGDOM GEFFEN 9862547 ENHANCED CD (2004)

For a band at the forefront of avant-rock, Sonic Youth sometimes seem to have a rather limited imagination. Early on in their history they made their infamous proclamation that they'd settled upon what they wanted to do and just wanted to make more money doing it. With hindsight it's as if they were taking a blood pact not to diverge from the 'SY sound' – and now can't or won't break it. Barring the brief blip that is *The Whitey Album*, their basic musical vocabulary has hardly changed since the first record back in 1982 - sluggish playing, guitar de-tunings, close-strumming and lazy arpeggios. And whilst they usually manage to find some new way of putting it to use, the follow up to 2002's *Murray Street* is one of those SY records that just gives us more of the same – including the same jewel case spine design, same studio, same laid-back and expansive sound, same songwriting approach, and even some of the same riffs (snatches of 'Rain on Tin' crop up in at least two songs here). It's diminished returns time, folks.

There is one innovation of sorts - the band make some uncharacteristic musical quotations, perhaps looking for inspiration from the past. I spotted *And Then They Were Three*-period Genesis, the crude moon beach slide-guitar of Joe Meek's Blue Men, Can's 'Bel Air', and even a brief snatch of Neu-style drumming all cropping up in paraphrased form, but none of this really gets them anywhere. Ironically it's drummer Steve Shelley (superficially the most traditional musician in the band) who seems to be the creative driving force nowadays, throwing in novel drum patterns at unexpected places as if to say 'C'mon, WAKE UP GUYS!' to the rest of the band. But Thurston, Kim, Lee and Jim just sound hamstrung by their limited technique, and they squander any opportunities to take a new direction. Which is not to say there aren't plenty of fine moments, spontaneous touches and juicy feedback mulchdowns on this record, but this time round the band can't quite seem to connect up and meaningfully harness the various ideas floating round their heads.

This is reflected in SY's elusive song structures which, to me at least, seem to be built on similar underpinnings to the mysterious music of the Krautrock band Popol Vuh, and that's no bad thing (nor is it the first connection we've observed between the two bands). But on *Sonic Nurse* the Youth's mercurial leaps between apparently unrelated musical themes reek of a lack of conviction in what they're playing. Several promising ideas stall when the band change tack unnecessarily just as they're getting into their stride. I could have listened to half an hour or more of the heavenly layered drone that opens 'I Love You Golden Blue' but it's cut off after just a couple of minutes, pointlessly forced into a rock format, a sign that Sonic Youth are still struggling to resolve the tension between their avant-garde and traditional sides.

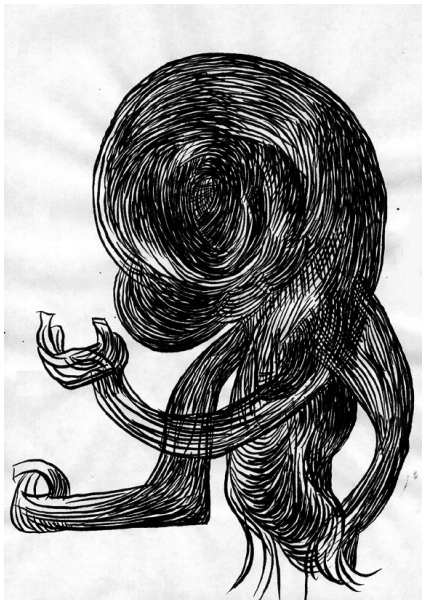
That said, this is a grower once you get over the disappointment of over-familiarity; not really a bad record by others' standards. Kim once again turns in the best song – the aforementioned '…Golden Blue', a touching ghost story sung in a gentle falsetto. And if *Murray Street* was a record for a lazy summer afternoon, I can testify that the edge-free sounds of *Sonic Nurse* are good material for a summer evening nap. But it's still a big comedown from the recent high of *A Thousand Leaves* - let's hope they don't choose to stroll any further down this particular blind alley.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

Comets On Fire
Blue Cathedral
USA SUB POP SPCD 647 CD (2004)

Maybe it's because COF are now on Sub Pop or, if you feel less cynical, it could be that they number psychedelic folk tunesmith Ben Chasny in their ranks but this third album from COF has a less harried, more measured and more accessible rock-oriented approach than the previous full-length *Field Recordings from the Sun*, and features obvious 70s influences like Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd among others. The COF musicians have all learned to cooperate better (though I must confess I found the fighting on *Field Recordings*... a lot of fun) so that on a number of tracks here the various instruments including saxophone, guitar, piano, organ and of course Ethan Miller's echoplex guitar can all be heard clearly and enjoy their time in the sun with plenty of nice clean space within the music. All tracks have a bit more structure and predictability to them but are still fairly loose and the distinctive COF sound is retained throughout although the psychedelic fuzz has gone.

All eight tracks are fine in their own way though those after the older COF style are directed to 'Whiskey River' and 'The Antlers of the Midnight Sun', the latter track especially featuring massive stoner rock riffs, some Zeppelin-style tunes, screeching vocals and insane sax playing. 'Brotherhood of the Harvest' is an obvious paean to early '70's Pink Floyd in sound, melody and atmosphere (the track title itself is a dead giveaway - some of Pink Floyd's early releases appeared on a label called Harvest Records) but does not actually do much apart from luxuriate in its own little world - a bit disappointing. The music gets pretty lumpen on 'Blue Tomb' and only Miller's echoplex is able to salvage parts of it.



The artwork is quite intriguing - just what is that mysterious object that seems to have gone splat behind the elephant's eye and mottled skin? Although I can't say I'm impressed with the CD packaging - the song titles appear only on the wrap-around slip case!

JENNIFER HOR
www.subpop.com

Isis
Panopticon
USA IPECAC RECORDINGS IPC-57 CD (2004)

Lightning Bolt
Wonderful Rainbow
USA LOAD RECORDS LOAD 041 CD / LP (2002)

Just a brief mention for these two great records. I would never have thought of buying either of these but for recommendation of a friend, who we'll call 'Norbert'. I now take both these as further evidence of some sort of guitar rock-noise renaissance that's been going on under our noses for some time. Lightning Bolt first impinged on my dull consciousness when supporting Boredoms at The Scala (London) March 2004, along with Black Dice I think...said gig was marred by my suffering flu-like illness, and the best your snivelling reviewer could do with Lightning Bolt was overhear them from the corridor. Their idea of putting drum kit on same level as audience struck me as a bit daft. Later phone call from 'Norbert' raving over ICA gig where he'd seen Lightning Bolt put me back on target; immediate purchase of this CD was his strong suggestion. The band are a duo who play bass guitar and drums; one of them always wears a wrestling mask; they always play in midst of audience (including gigs in living rooms); and they rock like twin red scaly demons, with wings, horns and talons. Drum kit on floor removes barriers between you and the music; this is radical, back to

basics rock. Chosen format and speed of their performance invites usual comparisons with Japanese duo Ruins. Most Ruins records however are positively intellectual compared to this scorcher. Also makes most Speed Metal sound pretty lame. This is the real stuff, a jolting dose of high-energy power-punch thrill!!

Isis, again not a personal choice; later letter from 'Norbert' said in passing 'new Isis LP is beyond belief incredible'...since he struck gold with Lightning Bolt, thought I'd try his suggestion again. What a revelation. Fantastic, stately, crystalline rock music, as hard and clear as a gigantic jewel embedding itself in your head over and over, as if attached to an enormous power drill...contrasted with Lightning Bolt which is mostly fast and furious, the entire *Panopticon* LP marches at uniform slowish pace, proceeding with grim determination over several very long tracks. It's a gorgeous production; sharp, clear, guitar strings ringing like mighty bells in minimalist, endlessly repeated figures. The only distortion you get is when vocalist leaps in with raging grunt-ugh style vocals, at which point the band press FX pedals to the floor and let rip. Noise suddenly lifts off like a Heavy Metal combo performing in a bucket of treacle, hammering home the message spewed forth from grunting vox. *Panopticon* is a fantastically listenable LP which I play frequently, buoyed aloft on its choppy dark-blue seas for many long episodes. All I know is this is the third full-length CD from this Boston five-piece, and they have developed a fair bit from their primitive start (apparently their early work is mostly grunting and fuzzed guitars), and the LP seems to contain some sort of 'concept' about surveillance in modern society. The Panopticon was an invention of the English 18th century progressive Philosopher, Jeremy Bentham (whose ideas are quoted here, among those of others); it was a kind of revolutionary idea in architecture for a jail wherein the prisoners were systematically coerced into becoming their own watchmen and guards. Juxtaposed with front cover, which shows an enormous cityscape photographed from above, and you can figure out what Isis think about living in the USA in 2004. A magnificent recording which I recommend!

ED PINSENT 04/12/2004
Ipecac Recordings, PO Box 1778, Orinda, CA 94563, USA
www.ipecac.com
Load Records, PO Box 35, Providence, RI 02901, USA
www.loadrecords.com
www.laserbeast.com

Zdrastvootie
Zdrastvootie
USA HOLY MOUNTAIN 72149LP
VINYL LP (2004)

Billed as 'instrumental avant-rock from Santa Cruz', here's a new LP from a US trio comprising Drew Adams and Scott Stobbe on guitars, with Sean Adams on the drums, plus violin of Sherri Ross on one track. Together they play pretty good rockin' discordant music, even if it is a little derivative – touches of The Magic Band, Little Feat, maybe even a little bit of fIREHOSE. Fans of Henry Kaiser are also advised to check in. Plenty of ill-fitting chord-changes, occasional explosions of wild and frenetic soloing and freaking out, and semi-organsied scrabbling for position while the drummer leads them across crazy changing time signatures. Excellent picking and chiming effects on those steel strings, strong rhythmic dynamics; tight playing, yet a good 'loose' vibe informs all the moves of this unit. They have a god 'natural' rock sound, eschewing pedal FX and studio treatment (maybe even no overdubs), for which the sound recordist Nicholas Taplin should take a bow; and there's real craft and invention in the playing. All of these are good things you rarely seem to find these days. There is something quite articulate about these dense and busy pieces; almost as though you remember hearing lyrics, yet it's all instrumental…they are capable of sounding quite wistful and confused about life, as well as coming across as plain old 'weird'. A good one.

ED PINSENT 07/11/2004
PO Box 420511, San Francisco, CA 94142, USA
www.holymountain.com

Nought
Nought
UK SHIFTY DISCO SHIFTY0008
CD (2000)

I found out about Nought by accident, back in early 2004 at the opening night of Mark Braby's Orchestra Pit club night in East London. Some friends and I had gone along mainly to see a Fall tribute band called The Hideous Replicas, the second act of three on the bill. After an enjoyable dose of pseudo-Markie Smitherie we felt we'd had sufficient entertainment for the evening, but decided to give the final act a couple of minutes listening time in the name of politeness. Forty minutes later all four of us were still stood there, rooted to the spot and wondering how much longer we could risk before before missing our trains home on a work night.

Nought were the people responsible for this – an instrumental hard metal band taking the classic rock trio configuration of guitar, bass and drums (and possibly, if my memory is not playing tricks on me, supplemented by a keyboard player on this occasion). One of the tightest and most focused acts I've ever seen live… only Extreme Noise Terror come close in terms of sheer committed focus on an incredibly intricate and idiosyncratic musical vocabulary. My aforementioned friends could normally care less about heavy metal or any other loud / fast / aggressive music, but they were as swept up as I was in the maelstrom of concentrated riffery, not wanting to miss any of the licks flying by at the speed of sound. The intense concentration and locked-in interaction of the band was palpable, yet at the same time the lead guitarist made reeling off another complicated super-fast riff look as easy as standing up.

Had to find out if they'd made any records – as it turns out, they made a CD back in 2000. This catches them at an earlier stage of their development and on first impressions the turn-of-the-millennia Nought sounded like a band of precocious schoolmates trying to be emulate 70s heavy rockers, the result falling somewhere between prog-rock and jazz-rock with a touch of Sonic Youth thrown in. The guitar took a back seat here to strings and horns (real or electronic I'm not sure) and I have to admit for a second the theme to The South Bank Show came to mind… yikes! Sudden changes of direction, difficult time signatures, multi-part songs, grandiose track titles ('Goddess Awakes', 'Nought II')… surely this was just a self-indulgent prog folly?

But before the first couple of tracks were out I found myself not caring one way or the other, caught up once again in the swift twists and turns of their music as it raced thrillingly from one riff to another. It strikes me that despite the loudness of their playing Nought have a lightness of touch which makes it engrossing rather than annoying. They also seem to have an implicit understanding of what was actually good about the much-maligned genre of prog rock. In fact they've found a way to improve upon it, which effectively makes them a British answer to excessive Japanese hard metal bands such as Mainliner, Musica Transonic and the Ruins (hell, the guitarist even looks slightly Japanese!). Roll on their next long player!

HARLEY RICHARDSON
http://www.noughtmusic.com/

Dead Raven Choir
Wine, Women and Wolves
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 052
CD (2003)

I confess this recording didn't appeal to me much but it's sure to pass muster with twentysomething art students. May I comment it's somewhat risky to attempt something dark and Gothic with poetry by Charles Baudelaire when Diamanda Galas set an impossibly high standard for that kind of musical package in the mid-1980s with *The Divine Punishment* and *The Saint of the Pit*? Especially when DRC's vocals are all either spoken or whispered. I can't help but think of the force and urgency Galas invested in that music and Smolken and friend Glenn Donaldson here fare poorly in comparison. True, Galas always did have that overly camp theatrical aspect but DRC here seem rather drained of energy despite occasional aggressive displays in the latter half of the CD. Perhaps this is due to the all-acoustic and sparse musical approach they have adopted for this album. Suspense exists but the atmosphere is not threatening. What music there is exists to build up drama and suspense but as the record lacks passion and force, everything seems pretentious and desultory; the tracks lack individuality despite the varied sources for the lyrics (Baudelaire, Hilaire

Bellocq, A A Milne among others). This is a pity as I understand this record is among the last DRC released before putting the Dead Ravens finally to rest some time in 2004; having released over 25 recordings (I think) in a 6-year period, DRC have ensured plenty of material for their fans to pick and choose from to last them a considerable while.

JENNIFER HOR
PO Box 2631, Providence, RI 02906, USA
www.lvd.4mg.com

Pharaoh Overlord
The Battle of the Axehammer (Live)
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD-058 CD (2004)

One of two currently available discs by this Finnish 'dark' rock combo. This one's a great live LP from 2001, containing just about everything you could possibly want from minimal-psychedelic heavy metal: loud volume, full-on distortion, lumpen rhythms and inane monotony. Battle of the Axehammer delivers the same numbing properties which you might derive from Sunn O))) and Earth, but unlike those bands the Overlord are still very much attached to a good solid rock beat…they render you insensate through primitive, basic, interlocking guitar and bass riffs, which are repeated mercilessly. Any form of ornamentation is kept to a minimum; don't expect show-off guitar solos, although there is evidence of some ingenious melodic work going on the background. Listening to it is a bit like trying to pick out scrimshaw-work concealed by a huge black canvas. Or perhaps having the top of your head sawn off by Neanderthal men, while Plato reads you a lecture about the new Republic.

There's little relief in these five relentless and lengthy tracks – 10 minutes is minimum requirement for these loopy Nordic men to get into their groove and exorcise the hungry demons that beset their doomed souls, and the only they can do it is by a process of ceremonial repetition. The mindless riffs are simply pounded into the ground by their remorseless performance, leaving listener either battered into insensibility or warped into a voodoo-type trance. Either way, you pretty much end up a zombie…great stuff! This band is the 'project' of main man guitarist Jussi Lehtisalo, and this is an original EKTRO recording licensed to American label Last Visible Dog. Front cover depicts a gigantic talon of winged creature descending on urban skyscrapers – very much in vein of *Q The Winged Serpent*. If you've ever seen that Larry Cohen movie, you'll know there's no escape.

ED PINSENT 25/09/2004
PO Box 2631, Providence, RI 02906, USA
www.lvd.4mg.com

Pharaoh Overlord
II
USA NO QUARTER NOQ003 CD (2003)

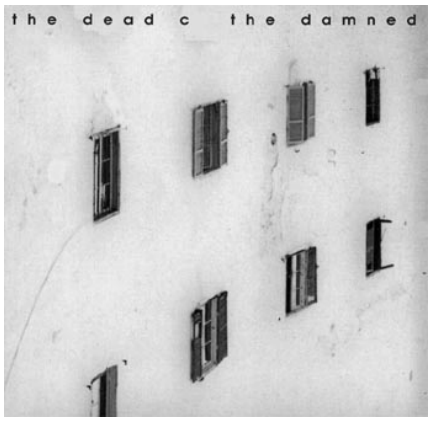
Another 'goodie' from these guitar-grinding gremlins, I presume a studio recording…6 fine doomy, sinister cuts recorded in 2002. Suggest you could purchase alongside above Live CD for the full Pharaoh experience. As alluded to previously, there's a lurking weirdness behind their combined sound which, in studio and in clarity of mix, becomes much more noticeable, but no less unsettling. What masquerades as a straight-ahead guitar 'boogie' (albeit a boogie that's fed by downers and thorazine) conceals odd drones, synth wails, tiny tremeloes. The studio environment also enables them to pile up stacks of razor-sharp acoustic, steel-string guitar overdubs, which add tremendous sheen and attack to the sound; it's not all hacking away at fuzzed-up electric axes, nor simply drowning in loud amplifier hum.

Sure enough, Jessi Lehtisalo (who takes credit for inventing this band) is also the writer and guitarist in Circle, another cult Finnish psych combo who played in London in 2004 (although missed by this reviewer). Jessi continues to make good his boast of providing

'vastly minimal psychedelic music'. They may not exactly 'let rip' with the conventional build-up and release that mainstream heavy Metal offers, but instead they successfully sustain a strong, black mood for a long time until it mesmerises audiences. There's less of the mindless, repetitive riffing which is much in evidence on live record, and even perhaps more noodling in Grateful Dead mode, which can't be bad. That said, Black Sabbath fans should scoop up this disc and make a beeline for 'Skyline', a punchy double-riffing update on the Sabs' 'Hole in the Sky'.

Beautiful sleeve – excellent gold and silver printing on black card with tons of filigree detail and a 'Mountain of Madness' image as a centre spread. Further Goblin-prancing mischief is suggested by use of recorders piping on 'Dark Temper'. Use this record to assuage (or aflame) your own dark humours…

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004
PO Box 42584, Philadelphia, PA 19101, USA
www.noquarter.net



The Dead C
The Damned
USA STARLIGHT FURNITURE CO ★21 CD (2003)

A decent example of live-band performance work from this New Zealand trio, heroes of underground rock they be, but I'm not as familiar with their back catalogue as I should be. Morley, Russell and Yeats are captured here from 2001 to 2003. Crude guitar mangling, lots of feedback and a plodding rhythm section, plus some instances of awful, off-key caterwauling and moaning vocals. Funny how 'popular' these guys are, and also that they were once considered to be pretty much unbeatable at the scuzzy guitar-noise game back in the day. Most of the competition coming out of the US nowadays wipes the floor with them, although they do also rejoice in that low-rent 'arty' vibe which is copped from The Sonic Youth. Not a bad disc, although on evidence herein it lacks the necessary force somewhere; both the singing and the playing come across as blocked and thwarted. Perhaps this is the 'damnation' the title refers to. Images of shuttered windows on cover do little to evoke such damnation, failing to depict the fires of Hell or the homes of the damned (where ironically, the cover of the Dustbreeders release on this same label, succeeds admirably). A turgid downer of ineffectual, thrashing, grind…sluggish, disconnected weak brew.

ED PINSENT 20/10/2004
PO Box 424762, San Francisco, CA 94142, USA
www.midheaven.com

Melvins and Lustmord

Pigs of the Roman Empire

USA IPECAC RECORDINGS IPC-54 CD (2004)

By far the best piece on this recording is the 20-plus minute title track featuring deep oppressive atmospheres, periods of silence and at least two passages of booming foghorn guitar sounding off repeatedly as though from a long distance. Here The Melvins, joined by a member of Tool, and Brian Lustmord play off each other to create a creepy sinuous epic combining Sabbath-rock elements and those of ambient / industrial soundscape music. True, the piece doesn't knock the socks off the SunnO))) men and the sinister vocal talents of Attila Csihar might have come in handy but this is a valiant first attempt by Buzz Osbourne and Co at experimental post-rock and it succeeds consistently throughout.

Unfortunately much of the rest of the album is patchy and not very original, and the collaboration becomes more of a competition to see who reaches the microphones' set-up first. When The Melvins decide to rock (which is a bit too often), they don't sound much different from yet another pseudo-Helmet / Metallica line-up suffering an overload of testosterone, steroids or repressed anger - a pity when the aforementioned Sunn O))) have demonstrated already what can be done with doom and stoner rock. At this point in time (1st October 2004), the prognosis for the forthcoming Melvins and Jello Biafra collaboration on Alternative Tentacles doesn't augur much joy for those of us hoping Buzz Osbourne and friends might be following in the footsteps of Japanese former Melvins tribute band Boris who have cut albums with Merzbow and Keiji Haino in the past.

JENNIFER HOR
www.ipecac.com
www.shock.com.au

Kiila

Silmät Sulkaset

BELGIUM (K-RAA-K)3 K043 CD (2003?)

Kiila belong to that community of Finnish psychedelic folk improv musicians which includes Kemialliset Ystavat, The Anaksimandros, Avarus and various others, all of which share musicians and ideas with one another. This record by Kiila, while it's not atmospheric in a way I'd hoped for (I had imagined a slightly misty or wintry background out of which the music would emerge ghost-like and into which it would recede almost imperceptibly; instead the production is clear in an almost bell-like way), is quite beguiling in a tribalist neo-primitive way. Initially the music seems naive and a little bit shambolic though I keep hearing hints of Godspeed You Black Emperor, especially on 'Kateet linnut'. (Someone shoot me if I mention that band again.) The musical direction reveals itself quite quickly: relatively structured if repetitive, almost poppy songs alternate with pieces of pure improv that sound as if they come from an undiscovered tribe of woodland elves instead of urban sophisticates playing their Marie Antoinette shepherdess game. The seven regular musicians including Sami Sanpakkila of Es and Fonal Records and their three friends appear to play quite a large collection of instruments that are not always in tune and which can sound amateurish and embarrassing (I think intentionally so) on the last track.

Overall, I find this CD to be quite pleasant but not dark (tracks 4 and 7 approach dark emotional territory but their repetitive melodies don't allow them to get too close there) and the power that could have vaulted Kiila sooner into the international spotlight therefore remains uncovered. Kiila's music needs to be less nice and obliging and the band should perhaps push in a more melancholy Gothic folk direction with a freer, more deranged musical style. Drawing on their country's history and musical traditions, and maybe those of neighbouring Karelia in the Russian Federation, may assist in this respect. And of course there is a whole load of Finnish psychedelic rock from the 1960s / 70s like Tasavallan Presidentti and Wigwam to trudge through ...

JENNIFER HOR
www.kiila.com
Fonal Records, www.fonal.com
(K-RAA-K)3, www.kraak.net

The Fall

(We Wish You) A Protein Christmas

UNITED KINGDOM ACTION RECORDS TAKE22CD CD SINGLE (2003)

Wow - no sooner do I complain about the cursory nature of recent Fall singles (in TSP 11), then MES delivers a stockingful of Fall goodies to my chimney. As his scribbled sleeve notes say: 'Music, Gossip, Pictures – All on one 4 track CD'. Great to know you're still listening to the kids, Mark!

You might be surprised though to find that (We Wish You) A Protein Christmas isn't the first festive effort from The Fall. For starters there was 'No Xmas for John Quays', way back on their first LP (Live at the Witch Trials), but in that case Christmas was just a setting for a cautionary tale about the pitfalls of excessive drug use. 'Numb (At The Lodge)' on the Cerebral Caustic LP (1995) cast the festive season as an excuse to retreat from the world into deadening comfort and familiarity (which 'kinda suits some'). The band also covered 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing' and 'Jingle Bell Rock' for the Xmas 1994 Peel Session. But the true precedent for this latest effort is 'Xmas with Simon', the jaunty b-side to 'High Tension Line' (1990), in which Smith presented us with scattershot observations on festive matters, delivering some of his funniest, most succinct lyrics – "Pity the people in the desert, Jesus did / Pity the people who've had too much dessert" – as well as a memorable singalong chorus: 'Jesus! It's Christmas'. Creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker would later cite this an influence on the South Park musical.

'(We Wish You) A Protein Christmas' (the track) takes a similar approach and whilst there's a note of weariness creeping into his bile, Mark can't help getting into the festive spirit, sneaking in a jolly Santa impression. The track is based on 'Protein Protection', one of the few tunes on the unreleased Country on the Click long player to emerge unscathed when said record was reworked and released as The Real New Fall LP. Here though it's given a good dusting of canned snow (that's a snatch of 'tis the season to be jolly' at the beginning), whilst making a nod to the more spiritual aspects of the festival: Heaven and Earth are represented vocally – for Heaven I think that's a mellotron doubling for the angelic host, and for Earth, well that five person choir on your doorstep is actually The Fall Group on ba-ba-ba-ba-backing vocals. This song'll give you a warm glow for sure, but it's not all cosy fireplaces and warm ale: off-key keyboard horns wander around in a broadly opposite direction to the main melody, and the main power chord sequence is slightly changed to leave it hanging on a more uncertain, unresolved note… giving it the uneasy atmosphere of a Christmas horror story and I think effectively (and possibly accidentally) communicating some rather mixed feelings about our nation's main religious festival.

The EP is rounded out with three typically diverse tracks. '(We Are) Mod Mock Goth' is an amusing character study over a single repeated Fall-patented sinister riff (variations on which they've used at least three times before) and features MES at his most growly and fearsome. In the extremely low-fi '(Birtwistle's) Girl in Shop' Smith throws out playful lyrics drunkenly over a keyboard line so crude The Seeds would've rejected it. ('What doesn't kill you will make you… longer! stronger!' - how many songs use a roll of toilet paper as a metaphor?). Finally, 'Recovery Kit 2#' is a remix of another Country on the Click track which strips the song down to its different elements and lays bare the secret structure of this eccentric dance masterpiece. Now, if only Smith would release the original version, which he deemed too slick… until he does, it's available on the Internet for any of you willing to risk 'the wrath of MES' (© Fall press release).

HARLEY RICHARDSON

▪▪▪▪▪F-E-E-D-B-A-C-K ▸▸▸▸▸

David Lee Myers

Arcane Device: Engines of Myth

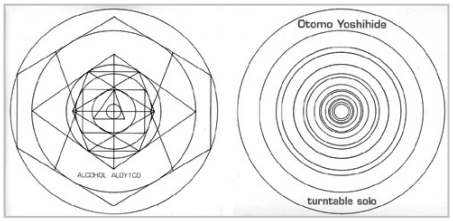
UNITED KINGDOM RER MEGACORP RER DLM1 CD (2003)

Everyone across the five continents is currently tipping their hats to Myers, the 'feedback pioneer' form the late 1980s, and you too can join in the fevered adulation by purchasing this timely release. It brings together both the full-length LP and the double-EP which were originally released on vinyl by the Recommended Records label, and their original artworks are reproduced inside; a handy way to access two 'classics', and strong examples of his great early period. Nowadays, everyone in the field of experimental music accepts that feedback is just about the only way left to go, and there's plenty of evidence available for that assertion. Well, Myers was doing it in 1988…how's that for prescience? Seriously, it is worth pointing out that his 'Arcane device' was the original no-input mixing board approach, since adopted by Toshimaru Nakamura (to great effect, of course). By contrast to Toshi's ultra-minimal performances, Myers is something of a maximalist; there's a terrific range and variety in his powerful howls, swooping bat-like cavorts and electric drones. And he never fails to generate a solid, chunky sound; it's thick enough to dunk in a cup of coffee, a porous donut of noise covered with golden syrup…

There is tremendous listening pleasure to be had in experiencing these illogical whoopings sounding in your ears; not just in the thick, plasticine sound, the unexpected patterns, the taste-defying textures, but also in the sequences of notes which are otherwise 'impossible' to render – musical strings and phrases of incredible abstracted complexity just pop right out of the box as if by magic. It's all improvised, all 'pure' feedback; time-delay electronic effects were used to enhance the basic source, but each episode was recorded live to tape with, one hopes, little or zero editing. Talk about going bareback…makes your average 20 year-old nerd with a laptop look like pretty spineless and cowardly.

And how do you like his cool 'Man-of-the-future' image, presumably used live on stage? Dinky round eyeglasses with coloured discs for lenses, a black jumpsuit…he looks like a cross between a Gerry Anderson villain and an extra from the set of *Things To Come*. Perhaps a touch of the Conrad Schnitzler look here. Speaking of things Germanic, this music was appearing just about the time that Kraftwerk lost their musical direction. If only I could use the music of Myers to persuade the narrow-minded fanbase of Ralf and Florian to persuade them in a new direction, but perhaps that isn't really needed.

ED PINSENT 28/09/2004
79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, UK
rermegacorp@dial.pipex.com
www.rermegacorp.com



Otomo Yoshihide

Turntable Solo

UNITED KINGDOM ALCOHOL RECORDS ALOY1CD 3" CD (2004)

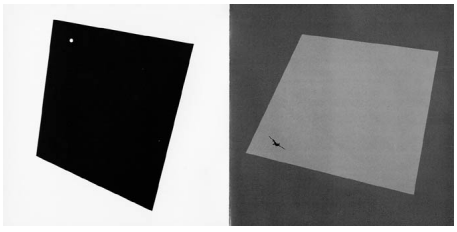
Good old 'Ottie' makes a welcome return to 'hideous racket' music mode here as he abuses his turntable via confident manipulation of the sensitive tone-arm in highly aggressive and daringly sexy way. No records were on the turntable at the time, so grinding noise and howling feedback are the principal results of his actions, and overall sensation arises of metal and electronics being mercilessly tortured and issuing an inchoate howling. Plus you get the familiar deep resonating hum of an amplifier turned up to very loud position, and occasional high-pitched squeals suggestive of sparks leaping upwards from the damaged equipment.

What with his new-found and deep commitment to making music in more quiet and gentle manner, it seemed for a while that 'Otters' had forsaken the sacred noise of yesteryear, but this 2002 document tends to prove otherwise – and likewise his antics on the June 2004 'Feedback Order from Noise' tour of the UK organised by Knut Aufermann, where Yoshi performed a similar noisy antic on his turntable for approx 10 mins. This little disc-ette was recorded at a venue in Tokyo by a film crew; the full document if broadcast or screened would indeed make for a striking piece of cinema. The sound is rich in dynamics and evince sheer joy of wallowing in noisy feedback (both trademarks of this great man) but his movement-performative skills also come across extremely vividly. Granted, even

the slightest gesture is bound to be magnified out of proportion by the sensitive equipment, yet you still feel like you're a hamster trapped on a giant rotating electronic wheel throwing off sparks...enjoy that rumbly ride...the violence of early minutes subsides somewhat however, and settles into what is merely an impenetrable fog of soothing and gritty static rumble and moaning that induces a trance-like state and gently massages your gills, o fish-like one.

If there's any deeper 'cultural' meaning attached to this ritualised massacre of a turntable (something Otomo has done many times on stage), it might reside in the deconstruction of a familiar electronic device and a reversal of its normal function. Take away the vinyl and it's no longer a machine for playing records; instead it generates its own private machine-language of formless noise, in revenge against mankind for general maltreatment it has suffered at our hands. For similar conceptual reversals and bouleversements, see *Compositions for Guitars Volume 2*. For similar use of a turntable, see Paul Hood.

ED PINSENT 18/09/2004
PO Box 556, London SE5 0RL, UK



Sachiko M, Toshimaru Nakamura, Otomo Yoshihide

Good Morning Good Night

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 042-2 2 x CD (2004)

Well, 'Holy Good Night!' seems an appropriate reaction when faced with a substantial double-disc offering from the 'holy triumvirate' of Japanese reduced

improvisation and minimal electronics, ie Otomo Yoshihide, Sachiko Matsubara and Toshimaru Nakamura. In August 2003, they quietly entered a studio in Tokyo and laid down the basis for this music, achieving completion in only two days. The following month saw a final mixdown issue from their hands. Amazingly, the roof did not fall in on the musical world as a result. Maybe it should have done.

The challenge for the trio seems to have been to set themselves quite extreme limitations: the least number of sounds, or variations thereon, being permissible at any one time. I imagine some sort of musical framework where the only allowable language comprised gentle purrs, vague hummings, high-pitched whines, grumbling, stutters of feedback, and sparkle-crackling. Every manifestation had to be completely abstract, off-white, and electronic; all elements bonding together within a chamber that was otherwise silent. Talk about your severe life-style…even hermetic monks lead a more exciting life than that! At least they only had to undergo this enforced restriction for 2 days…

Within this framework, our plucky threesome – now already starting to appear more like ghosts or shadows cast on white walls of the studio, than substantial human bodies – begin to form their random shapes, their vague patterns, their semi-regular configurations, following the improvisational and intuitive charts they carry around in their heads. Sounds are turned on, and cut off again; the stopping and starting method generates overlapping passages; everything placed there with a reason and with a purpose. It seems to be deliberately arranged so as to call attention to the very language they're using; in much conventional music, you rarely notice the basic 'grammar'. These are blank statements filled with meaning. Considerable discipline and restraint has been brought to bear to maintain this rigid stance so consistently. Imagine a drama school where actors are taught to express emotions and ideas, not through body language and posture, but through keeping very still for long periods of time. Tough going.

As to where this leaves us: this could be two discs of near-complete nothingness, or a truly momentous statement of severely-reduced minimalism. But the surprising thing is how good it is to listen to, once one learns how to accept the work on its own terms. I suppose a high degree of concentration is demanded of the listener, and you have to forget your preconceptions about 'music' and 'entertainment'. But hey, I know all you Sound Projector soldiers by now, and you can stick this one out easily. In a world where it seems every other improviser is currently opting for the 'quiet mode', this CD has already set a new gold standard in excellence for restricted and reduced music. Along with records like *Weather Sky*, it will be seen as a major benchmark in this area.

ED PINSENT 27/10/2004
www.erstwhilerecords.com

Sachiko M
1 : 2
FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET 09 3" CD (2003)

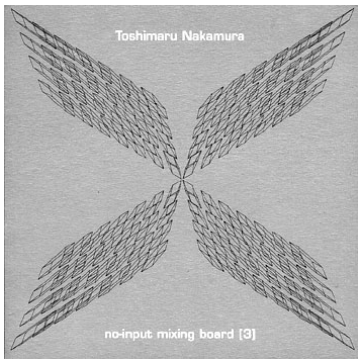
20 minutes of unbearable, high-pitched monotonous whining, produced by working one empty sampler and 3 oscillators. Another example of feedback horror, where the only chance of varying it lies with listener constantly repositioning head. Sachiko M is a genius and deserves a gold medal for her efforts in taking minimalism this far, but I can't really listen to this for pleasure; it's completely empty testcard music. 'She wants her music to have no memory,' informs helpful press release, as they lovingly detail the totally empty contents of her sampling box, free from any associations we might bring from our 'record collections or cultural databanks'. More rewarding results, may I suggest, can be gleaned from the *Good Morning, Good Night* double CD above, where she works in tandem with Toshi and Otomo who are able to leaven the severity of her attack. On the other hand, if you prefer it raw and uncut, then check in here immediately. This is a shrill endurance test of terrifyingly stark and shrill meaningless noise. Purchase at your own risk!

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004
www.abruitsecret.com

Sci Hi
Who Trusts Crucible?
Crucible Trusts No-one.
NEW ZEALAND THE EVERGREEN PARTIE 01 CD (2003)

This discload of feedback experiments comes from our good friend Eden Gully (Paul Winstanley) in New Zealand, who we briefly interviewed in TSP 12. I do like his lo-fi, materialist and unpretentious approach to his music (and his life, by extension), although this release is mostly aimless, and at 17 tracks there's about three times as much as you need of it. Each improvised-noise episode was laid down direct to stereo tape; feedback loops were put through analogue delay, a mixing desk, an equaliser and a digital effects processor. Winstanley has access to the equipment OK, but is he the master of his domain? It's not tightly disciplined, but neither is it quite wild and crazy enough to repay more investigation. The dynamics are restrained, and the whole disc is very samey. The main thing I like about this guy is that he can make you feel really strange after about 10-15 minutes exposure to his music, until you're completely lost in an abstract and lonely nowheresville.

ED PINSENT 10/10/2004
PO Box 68735, Newton, Auckland, Aotearoa
edengully@yahoo.com



Toshimaru Nakamura
No-input mixing board (3)
UNITED KINGDOM ALCOHOL RECORDS ALTN1CD CD (2004)

A round-up of further experiments and performances in the No-Input Mixing Board series (all episodes are carefully numbered and catalogued by Toshi) from December 2001 to March 2002; it's mainly studio workouts, plus two live ones from Japan and the UK. You might suppose that you've heard all you need by this guy, but you'd be wrong – he's getting better all the time, and finding areas for constant invention within the narrow field he has chosen. Not many working in the field of minimal / quiet music who possess Toshi's iron will, his control, his sense of dynamics…and the varied range he wrings from his simple tools is remarkable. It's all here…hissing, whining, rumbling, crackling…tunes, rhythms and beats. And the familiar 'enclosing' sensation, such that it's like being inside the 'Mosquito Chamber'. Write to me if you want to know what this reference means.

The real interest lies in the complexity and forethought of his ultra-dynamic delivery and performance. It is at this juncture that you realise it's not merely more process art. Indeed, it's utterly feasible to hear this feedback *as* music and not simply another novelty-noise act in the available welter of recorded noises. Toshimaru Nakamura has turned that corner…join him. Sleeve art is by Keita Egami, who did all the stage show backdrops design for the Japanorama shows in the UK. Geometric optical illusions are his 'bag'. A tasteful restrained package and one that graces this English label.

ED PINSENT 13/10/2004
PO Box 556, London SE5 0RL, UK
cproductions@britishlibrary.net

Spire

Live in Geneva Cathedral Saint Pierre
Touch Tone 21

CD One

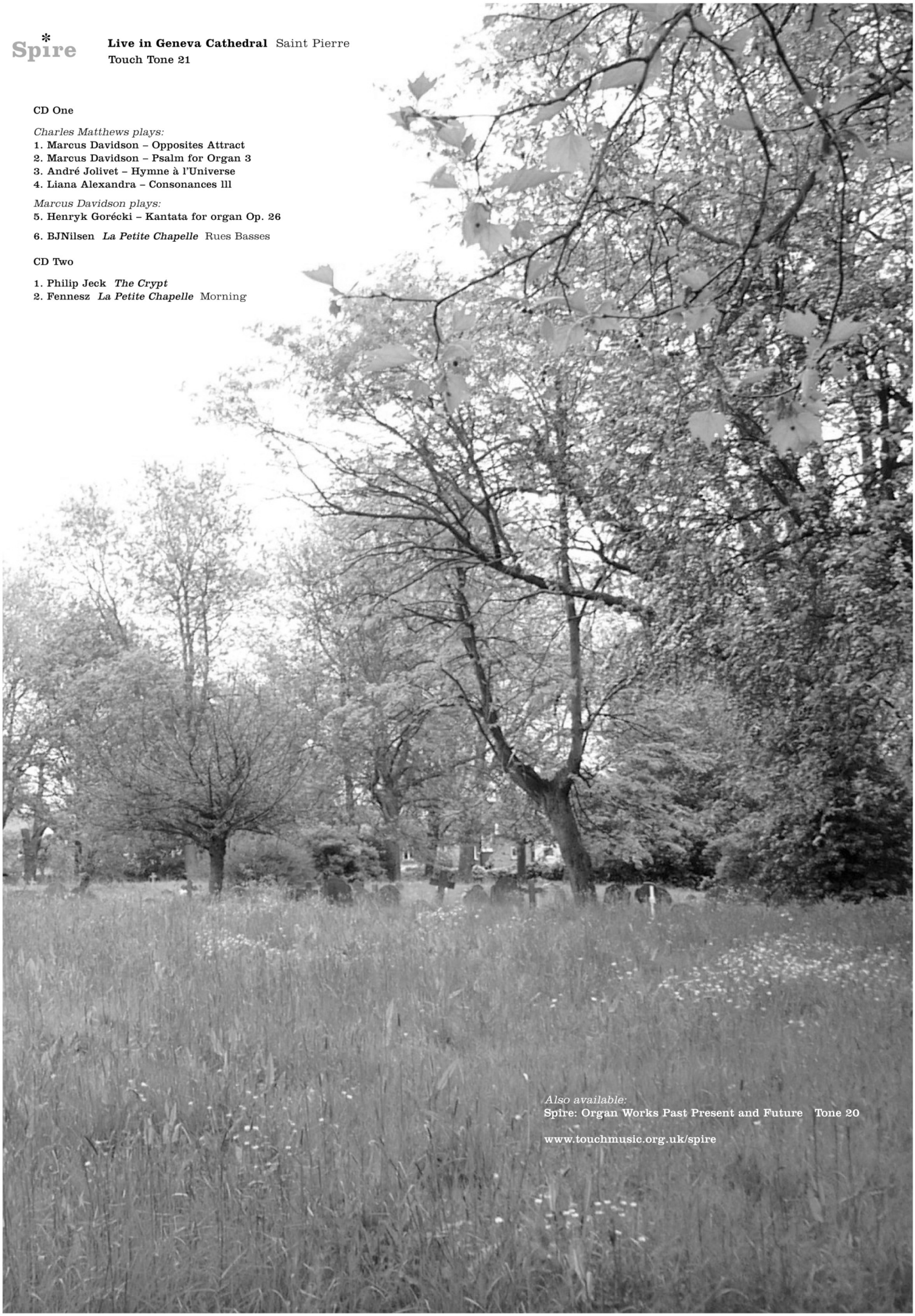
Charles Matthews plays:
1. Marcus Davidson – Opposites Attract
2. Marcus Davidson – Psalm for Organ 3
3. André Jolivet – Hymne à l'Universe
4. Liana Alexandra – Consonances lll

Marcus Davidson plays:
5. Henryk Gorécki – Kantata for organ Op. 26

6. BJNilsen ***La Petite Chapelle*** Rues Basses

CD Two

1. Philip Jeck ***The Crypt***
2. Fennesz ***La Petite Chapelle*** Morning

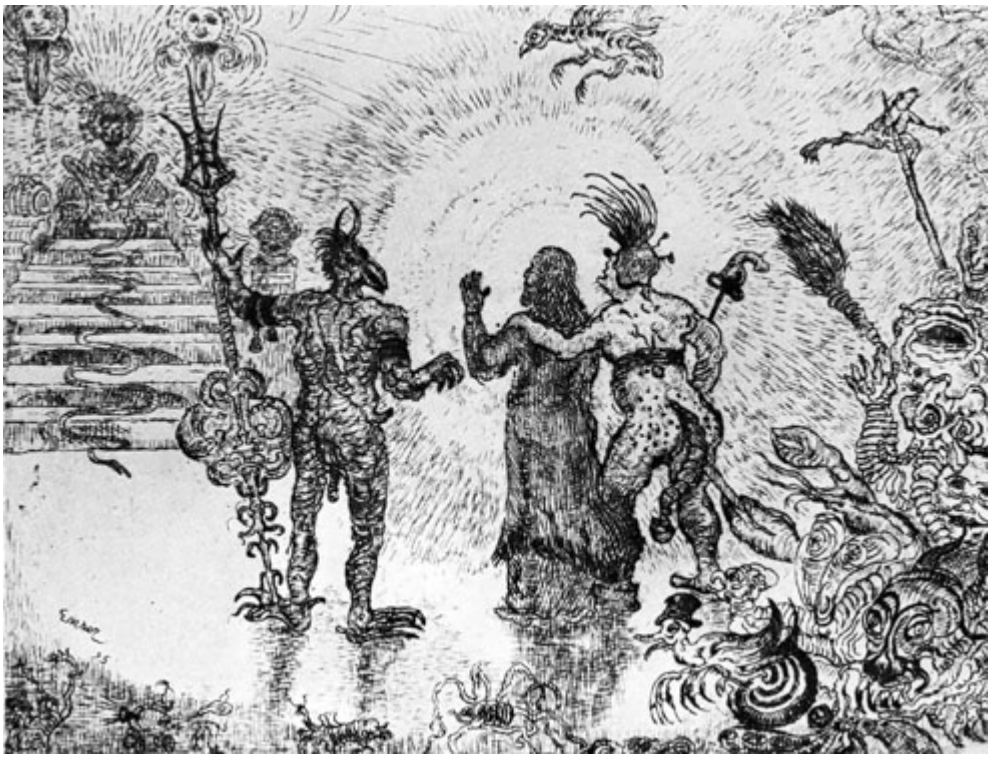


Also available:
Spire: Organ Works Past Present and Future Tone 20

www.touchmusic.org.uk/spire

■■ PAIN! ■■

LATEST BLACK METAL RELEASES REVIEWED BY JENNIFER HOR



Abruptum
In Umbra Malitiae Ambulabo, In Aeturnum In Triumpho Tenebraum
NORWAY DEATHLIKE SILENCE PRODUCTIONS ANTI-MOSH 009 CD (1994)

Very much an acquired taste is this, Abruptum's 2nd full-length release I think, consisting of one 60-minute long track that meanders through the lower sonic depths of Hell where all is dark and murky and echoes with the cries of the damned. Not surprisingly it's quite a painful journey for listeners: black metal's answer to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, vocalist IT screams in agony throughout while bandmate Evil explores the sinister by-ways of the nether regions with guitar, keyboards and gloomy atmosphere. Most of the time the pace is slow with occasional fits of cacophony as daemons mete out punishment to IT. Percussion plods and guitar drones moan, and atmospheric effects appear from time to time to enhance the cavernous, doomy production. The effect can be dramatic, operatic even, and if you can crawl through the black metal sludge with Abruptum as I have done a few times already, why, it only goes to show you're even more of a sucker for punishment than IT.

This was one of the last records to be released on the Deathlike Silence Productions label which wound up not long after the death of its founder Euronymous (1968 - 1993) who was an early champion of Abruptums's unstructured and improvised approach to black metal.

JENNIFER HOR
Voices of Wonder Records, Thv. Meyersgt. 33, 0555, Oslo, Norway
Modern Invasion Music: www.moderninvasionmusic.com

Abruptum
Casus Luciferi
SWEDEN BLOODDAWN PRODUCTIONS BLOOD 014 CD (2004)

By 2004, Abruptum had seemingly become the side project for Morgan Hakansson of Swedish metal band Marduk to express his more experimental / dark ambient yearnings which are apparent on this CD. The title track kicks off with a forceful martial beat against which an angrily insistent guitar drone rails with help from more industrial-sounding effects; part of the way through, the track pauses for a short series of guitar washes before resuming the relentless pace, this time with added guitar noise feedback. This is easily the best piece on the album, very hypnotic and 100% EVIL - but of course, is not Abruptum 'the audial essence of pure black EVIL' as proclaimed by an earlier Abruptum album *In Umbra Malitiae Ambulabo ... Tenebraum*? Ye may judge for yourselves.

The other tracks are shorter but more atmospheric: 'In Ictu Oculi' combines traditional Christian elements with a continuous grinding buzz rhythm. I think of that Poppy Z Brite novel in which two repulsive serial killers eviscerate a young male prostitute when I hear this track: I forget the book's title but I do remember the exploits of US serial murderer and cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer were a major inspiration for the novel. Very gruesome! The remaining 2 tracks are very atmospheric in a dark way and feature strong heavy guitar drones, stark rhythms, deep spaces and disorienting violin-like effects. Overall, *Casus Luciferi* is a darkly industrial ambient work with a heavy emphasis on guitar-generated drones (Southern Lord alert here!) and few obvious

black element elements: possibly a new direction for Abruptum is beckoning here. I think Euronymous, were he still alive, would approve of what Hakansson has done.

JENNIFER HOR
Blooddawn Productions: www.blooddawn.net
Regain Records: www.regainrecords.com

Abruptum
De Profundis Mors Vas Cousumet
SWEDEN BLOODDAWN PRODUCTIONS BLOOD0006 MINI CD (ND)

This mini-CD, consisting of 3 tracks totalling 16-plus minutes, probably isn't typical of Abruptum's style and the band may have released better music in the past but it's a likeable recording (to me anyway) and an interesting introduction to the band. The highlight is the 8-minute opus 'Dodsapparaten', an extremely noisy whirlwind affair closer to Japanese noise than black metal and painful on the ears: think of the work Merzbow was doing 10 years ago before he went digital or his fellow Japanese noiseniks Hijokaidan and you've got a fair idea of what the track is like. A church bell chimes maddeningly throughout and somewhere in the sonic hurricane mix there's someone being tortured - a pretty likely scenario with a band like Abruptum.

The title track is relatively safe black metal territory for those wanting a bit more melody and structure though the screaming can be distressing. I confess I'm not all that au fait with Abruptum's personnel changes to date but I was under the impression that their vertically challenged vocalist had left the band for health reasons (!) only to rejoin his colleagues at a later date.

Black metal bands with a nutty sense of humour (very apparent across all 3 pieces on *De Profundis* ...) are a bit hard to find and I get tired of English bands who overdo the campy aspects of black metal and heavy metal subculture in general so it's a relief to see a band like Abruptum whose sense of humour suits me fine though it's at someone else's expense.

JENNIFER HOR
Blooddawn Productions: PO Box 609 601 14, Norrkoping, Sweden
Regain Records (distributor): PO Box 12026, SE-245 02, Hjarup, Sweden

Burzum
Hvis Lyset Tar Oss
BRAZIL SOMBER MUSIC SM021-CD (ND)
(ORIGINALLY RELEASED BY MISANTHROPY RECORDS 1993)

If you didn't know Burzum, you'd swear that the music on this release was the work of a group instead of one man playing all the instruments with drum

machine backing perhaps - such is the quality of the music and the care and attention devoted to the details and synchronising the instrumental parts. The sound of Burzum is distinctive: an ongoing chainsaw guitar buzz, made up of strings of notes played fast, gives the effect of a continuous storm against which Varg Vikernes plays pained and despairing synthesiser, and sings in an anguished rasp; this is intended to have a hypnotic and thus a consciousness-changing effect on the listener though the playing is not technical in the usual mainstream hard rock / heavy metal sense. The drumming can be tinny at times but the overall effect of Burzum's sound and the atmosphere of the record are most important here.

My copy of the CD gives the lyrics in Norwegian and German only so I can only guess that the words to tracks 1 to 3 are of an existential bent, and a negative one at that, in which hope and the light of day eventually give way to emptiness and the everlasting night of winter. Track 4, 'Tomhet' ('Emptiness') is an all-synth affair, long but pretty steady, making good use of pure tones and repetition to create a sense of pensive alone-ness if not loneliness, though towards the end it accidentally falls into almost banal

New Age synth territory. As with some of Burzum's other albums, the CD sleeve artwork was done by Norwegian artist Theodor Kittelsen: the strongly textured drawings draw out the pain, physical and psychological, of lonely existence, despair and death. Certainly a man of dark thoughts is Herr Vikernes!

JENNIFER HOR
somber@sombermusic.com
www.sombermusic.com

Carcass
Choice Cuts
UNITED KINGDOM EARACHE RECORDS MOSH 220 CD (2004)

I got this album for the two Peel Sessions which UK grindcore metal band Carcass recorded in 1988 and 1990 when their music was fast, furious and erratic heavy metal improv and their idea of songcraft was packing a huge bunch of crunchy guitar riffs together and ripping through them at blinding Mach 2 speed. As the band's career progressed and the cheeky boys from Liverpool learned to write 'real' songs, their music moved closer to mainstream death metal, then heavy metal and (with post-Carcass bands Firebird and Black Star) melodic hard rock. (When Charles Darwin wrote *On The Origin of Species* over a century ago, he obviously did not have anything like Carcass's musical 'evolution' in mind.) When Carcass downed tools in 1996, they left behind a legacy of five studio albums all sounding quite different plus a couple of EPs and these are sampled on 'Choice Cuts' in chronological order with the Peel Sessions coming at the end as bonus tracks.

Of the compilation, the two appetisers from the first Carcass album 'Reek of Putrefaction' are the best: raw, fast, chaotic and with an appropriately filthy and sludgy sound to boot. Subsequent tracks have a cleaner sound and steadier pace, dummer Ken Owen's occasional tendency to go for broke at 1,000 bpm notwithstanding, with recognisable melodies that sometimes fall into rock boogie. The singing also shifts from violent gargly near-black metal rasp duetting with deep tombstone vocals to more conventional and not very interesting death metal solo singing which has to fight through dense lyrics. The 'nadir' is plumbed with songs from Carcass's last two albums *Heartwork* and *Swansong* (diehard Carcass fans and the ex-Carcass men themselves can argue with me all they like!) where the obsession / revulsion with the body and its constituents (were the boys recovering Catholics? I wonder) is ditched in favour of a more political agenda and the band's music becomes more or less generic death / thrash / melodic heavy metal.

The Peel Sessions kick in and my faith is restored: the 1988 sessions, sounding as if they were recorded in the bathrooms of the infamous Tuol Sleng death factory in Cambodia (the place used to be a primary school and then a high school - what an irony), rocket along thanks to

Owen's nuclear-powered drumming and guitarist Bill Steer's howling guitar. Bassist Jeff Walker's vocals, mixing Donald Duck and serial axe murderer, have to be heard to be believed. The overall result is heavy overwhelming music that fair cleans out the brain. Very good stress therapy, don't you think?

The 1990 Peel Session songs have a clearer production with a slower pace and deep rhythm, and the band's approach is more aggressive and focussed, Walker's vocals in particular being full of vicious relish. (Post-Carcass / Black Star, Walker walked away from music altogether and now works in the UK public service where presumably his logorrhoeic talents are engaged in penning indecipherable departmental memos and circulars. Now that would really be cheeky!) A couple of tracks highlight Carcass's groove tendencies and their fast-slow-fast style of playing.

Carcass were the closest heavy metal got to free-flowing, liberated improv this side of Scandinavia (check out early Mayhem and Swedish black metal improv band Abruptum) and it is unfortunate that they did not continue in this, er, vein after 1990.

JENNIFER HOR
email@earache.com

Esoteric

Subconscious Dissolution into the Continuum

USA SEASON OF MIST SOM 085 CD (2004)

This Birmingham band somehow escaped my attention way back in the early 1990's when UK heavy metal bands like Godflesh, Napalm Death, My Dying Bride, Paradise Lost and various others were major league stars in my tiny little mind. The extreme and sometimes thoughtful if not always very creative or innovative approach of the bands of that period is still present on this, Esoteric's fourth album, which is slow and deep doom metal with a droning rhythm, combined black metal / death metal-style vocals and a clear production which adds a melancholy Gothic majesty to the music. The style is minimal: guitar riffs draw out the abrasive tones of the instruments and twist and turn in different directions, usually involving changes of key; there are no obvious melodies and no instrumental soloing. The atmosphere is bleak and desolate, the singing is either full of anger or anguish and the lyrics speak of existential dread or loathing. In short, everything that has probably been done in English doom metal for nearly 40 years (if one dates the genre back to Black Sabbath's appearance in 1968) is more or less present here yet Esoteric give the formula much needed gravitas and depth, and extend its parameters somewhat. The fourth track in particular is an ambient string of repeating harsh echoing sound washes which points in a

more atmospheric and drone-heavy direction. Esoteric may not necessarily care to travel in the footsteps of SunnO))) and seem quite content to mine their particular brand of minimal heavy metal drone but a more conventional melodic and tuneful heavy rock path seems not their style, so it will be interesting to see where they can take their music next.

JENNIFER HOR
www.season-of-mist.com
esoteric@bereft.co.uk
www.bereft.co.uk

Mayhem

De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas

NORWAY DEATHLIKE SILENCE PRODUCTIONS / VOICES OF WONDER RECORDS ANTI-MOSH 006 CD (1993/94)

Mayhem their name is and certainly mayhem were the circumstances surrounding this album when it was recorded in 1992/93 by the then line-up of Hellhammer (drums), Euronymous aka Øystein Aarseth (guitars) and Attila Csihar (vocals) with help from Count Grishnackh aka Varg Vikernes on bass. Csihar took over on vocal duties when previous incumbent Dead suicided (and part of whose brain supposedly ended up inside Euronymous who apparently also took photos of the death scene) and he in turn had replaced original vocalist Maniac who - irony of ironies - now performs with the current incarnation of Mayhem. Also after *De Mysteriis ...* was recorded, Euronymous and Count Grishnackh fell out over various matters including money that was owed, and the resulting enmity between the former friends (Euronymous had brought CG to Mayhem after the previous bassist left) culminated in CG's vicious stabbing murder of Euronymous, for which he's now serving a 21 year jail sentence; this was recently extended by another 2 years when Vikernes failed to return from day leave last October 2003, necessitating a massive police search over several days during which he hijacked a Mercedes and a Volvo - trust a neo-Nazi to hijack only the Aryan-made cars - and came by a large collection of knives and firearms.

The music is frenzied and furious minimalism: guitars blast away in a raging buzzsaw drone over which a spiky trebly lead guitar sometimes appears and Hellhammer thrashes away on the skins at nearly 300 bpm. The music is too aggressive and chaotic to allow for much technical or musical sophistication and the production is basic - in those days, black metal bands were often skint and could only afford very basic or even broken instruments, and equally primitive equipment and facilities. Effect is what's most important with early black metal and that's what we certainly get here: the overall impression is of relentless aggression and frightening evil. The very atmosphere is Death itself, even the short spaces between tracks seem foetid. Csihar's vocals, deep and tombstone-raspy, are leisurely compared with the frenetic pace but add a special brand of darkness to the general sound, though in some tracks his Hungarian accent can be hilariously 'I've come to suck your blood' campy and the operatic singing of the pseudo-Latin lyrics on the title track is probably unnecessary.

Ah, the lyrics! - penned by Dead, they draw little sketches of dark nights, daemons, pagan folks overcome by fear and superstition, and, in the title track, unholy rites performed by a coven of 13 reading from a book of human skin with a script written in blood - rites that fall a bit flat because they involve sacrificing a goat. Having read about some of the lynchings carried out in the United States between 1865 and 1940, many of which had the characteristics of human sacrifice complete with a carnival atmosphere, the torching of the victim, the deathly silence of the crowd witnessing the victim's rite of passage and the communal feasting that followed, I find the title track underwhelming. Come to think of it, maybe the 'goat' is a euphemism for something else. There are actually few details about the rites in the song, it's up to the listener to imagine them in their gory glory, and that's the purpose of the lyrics overall: they provide enough of the basic picture and the listener's imagination takes

over from there.

The achievement of *De Mysteriis ...* which makes it still a highly regarded record, is a style of free-flowing black metal drone close to minimalism and noise: Euronymous's guitarwork is nearly all sandstorm intensity and power, a twisting and turning tornado, full of unstoppable rage. And to think this music was created in circumstances that could not be less favourable to producing quality music: an unstable line-up, limited or poor quality equipment! Unfortunately, the infamous subsequent events meant this achievement could not, and for all I know, cannot be replicated though I'm sure Mayhem are still trying their darnedest to capture the intensity and raw aggressive power and even to surpass it. As are also hundreds and possibly thousands of Mayhem wannabes and others around the globe; I give bands in maybe Russia, South America or Israel the best chances since some combination of poverty, on-going violence and senseless death close at hand seems a prerequisite for this kind of music.

Notoriously, in spite of requests from Euronymous's relatives, the bass parts on *De Mysteriis ...* were not re-recorded so yes, that's Count Grishnackh's bass the listener can hear though it's virtually flooded by Euronymous's guitars.

JENNIFER HOR
Voices of Wonder Records, Thv. Meyersgt. 33, 0555, Oslo, Norway
Modern Invasion Music:
www.moderninvasionmusic.com

Striborg
Misanthropic Isolation / In the Heart of the Rainforest
AUSTRALIA ASGARD MUSIK ASA004 OR ASA007 CD (2003)
Striborg
Nocturnal Emissions / Nyctophobia
AUSTRALIA FINSTERNIS PRODUCTIONS FINSTER 11 CD (2003)

Each of these CDs by Tasmanian black metal band Striborg (which appears to be a one-man project directed by one Sin-nanna and thus the closest analogy Australia has to Varg Vikernes's Burzum project which terminated a few years ago) contains two albums originally released on CD-R/demo format. Striborg is one of a small group of bands including Mirk and Kill the Kristians making up the self-contained Tasmanian black metal scene which prefers its following to be small and loyal. Of course such a small scene (for want of a better term) won't necessarily attract the resources it needs to create good quality (in the strict technical sense) music which means these 'double' albums have a very raw and primitive quality without the full-bodied oomph that the Burzum project could afford, relatively speaking. Even so, limited resources certainly don't get in the way of Sin-nanna's ambitions and willingness to experiment with ambience and Gothic elements in Striborg's music.

The first CD, *Misanthropic Isolation...* contains older material recorded 1998-2000 and 2001 respectively, and is very, very raw and aggressive; in parts, it sounds so E-V-I-L you'll believe Sin-nanna has a direct phone line or oil rig drill down to Satan in the ninth layer of Hell where all is black ice and frozen dead over. Judging from the background guitar hailstorm (a bit light in sound but furious and chainsaw-grinding nevertheless), one may think Sin-nanna is channelling the very spirit of Euronymous himself. 'The Long Dark Path' in particular is a great highlight in the history of evil black metal with those terrible echoing vocals and relentless if tinny drum machine rhythms; other outstanding tracks include 'Where Cold and Darkness Meet' (more echoing vocals) and 'Forest of Fear' (a fog of noise in a deep cavern more like) but generally this CD spits out hyperfast and angry pieces, short on musical finesse but strong on mood and effect.

The second CD *Nocturnal Emissions...* features longer and fewer songs; the first track 'Nocturnal Emissions' is 20 minutes long with a 3-minute beginning of misty hiss that could almost be mistaken for static. The songs are slower and have a more definite structure with some Gothic and dramatic (even theatrical) elements which sometimes border on kitsch; the production is still as raw as ever and storms of chainsaw guitar continue to thrash in the background with the unexpected and perhaps unusual effect of pushing the rhythm section to the fore. As with the previous CD, Sin-nanna's lyrical concerns focus on dark and creepy forests (in Tasmania, rainforests are generally cool) and

sinister landscapes, the night and isolation borne of loathing for other people's shortcomings, with an unexpected departure in 'Son of the Moon', a heartfelt piece of fatherly love and pride for son Zachariah aka Sin-nanna junior. All together now: AWWW!!! Don't it just bring tears to your eyes? One notes the songs are less aggressive and more melodic than on the first CD and can border precariously on mawkishness at times. Two outstanding tracks here are 'Under Black Rain' a near-improv piece featuring violin, simple percussion and thunderstorm effects, and 'Into Night Moor' which is a short and repetitive piece with an unusually clear sound; this probably could have done with a longer playing time and more musical development.

Two very different CDs from Striborg on offer here then, the first one I think more varied and interesting on the whole than the second. At this time of writing, there was also a new 2004 release *Spiritual Catharsis*, mentioned on Encyclopedia Metallum. As to why black metal should be thriving in Tasmania of all places, I can only surmise that the island state's particularly brutal history as a gulag in the 1800s including the near-genocide of the original Tasmanians combined with the state's relative economic backwater status (resulting in a small, mostly Anglo-Saxon population with perhaps an insular attitude) and the pristine landscapes still to be found offering isolation and refuge for outsiders of all types, offers a congenial environment for black metal to develop and thrive.

JENNIFER HOR
Asgard Musik: www.asgard.com, www.geocities.com/asgardmusik
Finsternis Productions: PO Box 54, Snug, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 7054
See also Encyclopedia Metallum, www.metal-archives.com

The Meads of Asphodel

Exhuming the Grave of Yeshua

UNITED KINGDOM SUPERNAL MUSIC FERLY010CD (2003)

Technically speaking, the music on this CD doesn't really count as black metal: the pace is not fast or chaotic enough, and the sound and production are rather clean with none of that icy 'blasted heath' atmosphere to fog up the proceedings. Indeed, a lot of the music isn't metal at all: the heavy rock stuff is but a template for soaring spaced-out synths, some solo piano, some punk, proggy rock melodies, acoustic guitar passages, Middle Eastern-influenced tunes and rhythms and, towards the end, a Monty Pythonesque narration sequence and some whacked-out dancey techno-electronica. As you can guess, the music isn't very consistent and at times these UK space crusaders (their name is partly derived from Ancient Greek mythology - the asphodel refers to a flower that grows in the Elysian Fields in Hades) give the impression they're still finding their feet and appropriate place in the space/time dimension but their raison d'etre - stripping the mythology surrounding the figure we call Jesus Christ to reveal the human beneath and at the same time exposing much of organised, hierarchical Christianity as propaganda and social control - pulls all the tracks on the album into one accusatory whole. If this is blasphemy, then MoA qualify as black metal of a sort.

Of the 11 tracks (track 11, 'Book of Dreams', is actually a bonus piece), among the best are '80 Grains of Sand' which is as close as MoA get to black metal (the track includes a recording of a rabbi reciting a Jewish death prayer) though one gravel-voiced vocalist just about unravels on the 3rd verse; and 'Guts for Sale' which has a nice melodic guitar passage. MoA include a cover of the Hawkwind song 'Utopia' which in the context of this CD bespeaks a sarcastic attitude to what awaits fallen Christian soldiers in the afterlife. 'Sons of Arak Rise' is another quite outstanding track, sliding from near-black metal with a rhythm flecked with Middle Eastern flourishes into symphonic prog metal. The lyrics verge on the cerebral; it's only on 'Sluts of the Netherworld' where the vocalists invoke the names of death and chthonic gods of various Semitic and Indo-European mythologies that MoA really start showing off but thankfully they never go OTT.

The highlight - from MoA's point of view, not mine - is track 10 with a ridiculously long title and music sprawling across various music genres and scenarios of war and mass slaughter. The narration is hilarious if ghoulish: we are continually and sardonically reassured of God's, er, nearness to us while people scream in pain and anguish; after this passage when all have died, carnival music starts up amid sounds of machine guns. (Don't you just love the English sense of humour?) At this point the album proper ends though if you wish you may continue with the bonus track which I find not all that remarkable.

In an age where the world's sole superpower is dominated by fundamentalist Christians hellbent on bringing the Bible's Book of Revelations into reality and also by neoconservative followers of German-American philosopher Leo Strauss (forced to flee Germany in the 1930's because of his Jewish origins, Strauss resisted liberal democracy and believed religion was a necessary tool for political elites to maintain order and stability and keep people under control), the Meads of Asphodel are a very welcome presence indeed; if they can maintain a stable line-up (on this CD, they rely on a couple of ex-Hawkwind people and Mirai of Japanese black metal band Sigh among other special guests) and their sense of humour, and find something decent and more fashionable to wear – they must feel quite hot and sweaty playing spacey rock music in their chain mail armour - they should go far with their eclectic brand of heavy metal.

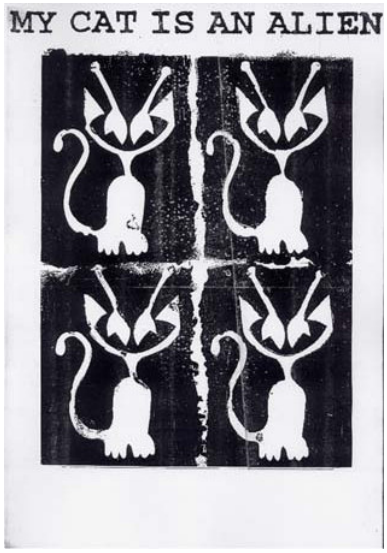
JENNIFER HOR
www.supernalmusic.com
www.themeadsofasphodel.com

MY CAT IS AN ALIEN

26 questions from The Sound Projector
Conducted by email 30 September 2004

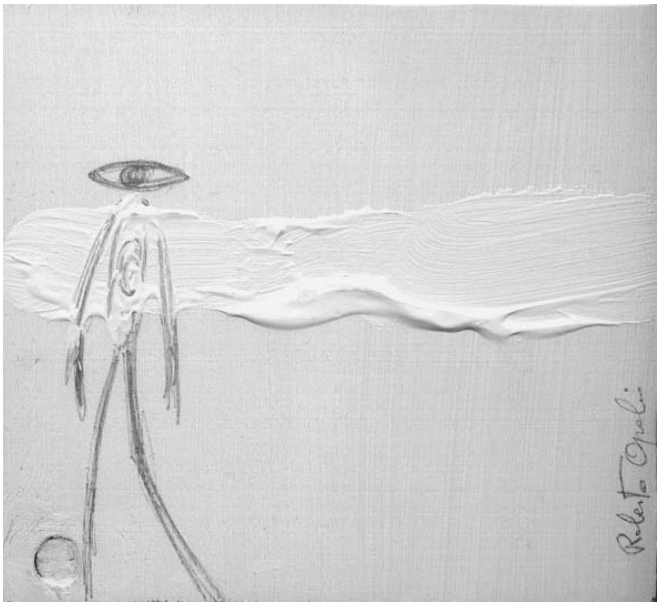
What was the original idea behind the band? When did MCIAA start making music?

Maurizio: When I first started up MCIAA in '97 as my solo project, my idea was to develop some songs of mine, putting them on a 4-track cassette recorder. At that time Roberto had not started playing yet, being involved in paintings, installations, glass-works and photographs. I was really into sculptures and installations too, experimenting with forms which combined materials like wood and metal, and so I decided to use the same approach in music. I recorded a bunch of weird free-noise folky songs, and I made an edition of 30 copies, cd-rs wrapped in electric wires, helped by Roberto. After sending one copy to Sonic Youth in NYC, the legend goes that they "unwrapped it, played it, and were immediately and pleasantly flattened by its green ray emanations". So impressed as to invite MCIAA to open their forthcoming Italian tour. It was on that occasion that MCIAA formed as a proper band, since my brother joined picking up a gtr for the first time ever, playing abstract space-noise sounds. Since we started working together, we felt this great empathy between us and we realized that we needed to focus on what eventually came to be our spontaneous free-improv approach to music. This is the original idea behind the improv duo MCIAA.



Why do you have such a minimalist guitar style?

Roberto: Minimalism is the style which fits us the best. We really love historic recordings like Tony Conrad's 'Four



violins', Alvin Lucier's 'Music on a long thin wire', Jon Gibson's 'Visitations', as well as Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music* and Remko Scha's 'Machine guitars'…

Maurizio: Since I started playing gtr, I've always been into kind of reiterating tunes, and when I began performing with Roberto, working on long and minimal textures of space gtr chords came naturally to us. We could play white-noise gtr attacks as well as intimate ambient-suites: in both cases the result would sound very minimalist…

Would you describe your work as difficult to listen to?

Maurizio: Well, my brother usually has breakfast listening to Keiji Haino…I mean, I think you just have to get into it, the same way you get into anything else you feel you're interested in.

Why does your work often seem to occupy so much time, and take so long to get started?

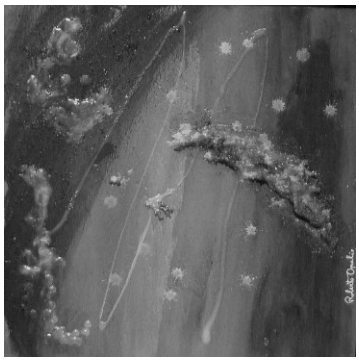
Maurizio: We're not trying to play any kind of trick: sometimes we just feel the sounds as if they came from a very distant place, through a million galaxies or from a remote region inside our minds…I mean, sometimes our music takes so long to get started 'cause, primarily, we do feel/hear sounds very distant. As for the endings, we go on playing 'till we feel that sounds have exhausted their own whole meanings.

What, to you, is the point of releasing a record with little more than the sounds of amplifiers humming?

Roberto: I think you're referring in particular to our triple CDR set *Out of the Blue - into the White*…well, actually I'm directly responsible for the way we got this record out on Opax Rec. This is what happened: one night two years ago we entered our Space Room and set up a total free-rock improv session; we played for a bit more than one hour, then we put our gtrs down and left the amplifiers going on humming, in order to make everything proceed in accordance with the principle of non-intervention: we just stayed in the room in complete silence and immobility, paying attention to the thin, soft, raw and scratching sounds which floated through the Space Room's night air…it was mesmerizing, as well as watching the winter dawn from our balcony…the tape recorder was on and it fixed everything. The day after we listened to the first 'played' part of the session and it was good for a one-cd issue, but I thought the rest was fine too, maybe even better…so, I proposed to get all out as a triple cd-r set in a special see-through pluriball packaging, handmade by Maurizio, with the second half of disc 2 and all the 70 minutes of disc 3 consisting of pure streamline amps crackling. Of course, my brother was enthusiastic about it too…This may sound a bit crazy, but we'd really like to see this set released one day as a 4 LP set: this stuff would sound perfect on vinyl!…especially the last 4 sides!

Would you say your sound-poem 'Il Segno' presents a bleak view of the world?

Roberto: 'Il segno' represents an important stage for us; music and text are strictly correlated, both conceptually and musically, and music + text together create its deeply impressive atmosphere…I wrote the poem/text before, not really thinking of using it for a musical piece; then, a couple of days later, we improvised a session which fitted the intimate sense of my writing…so, I tried to overdub my spoken-word poem, shaping each word with the sounds, and it worked well. Everything was done at the first take, using an old screeching microphone. I don't know exactly if 'Il segno' presents a bleak view of the world, but I'm sure it shows our sad and realistic view. Behind its surrealistic metaphors, you can find our intimate perception of life, our feelings of physical and psychic isolation as well as of non-belonging to the reality which we live in. It's about the meaning of being consciously 'aliens' in a world of just apparent normality, which hides the shadow of inhumanity instead. We sent the recording exclusively to Seymour Glass' Starlight Furniture Co. in San Francisco (even though we'd never had contact before), 'cause I had his label on my mind; so, when Seymour replied saying he was enthusiastic about the work and wanted to release it, we really couldn't believe it…this was 'the Sign'!



Does your work have a pattern or theme, and if so how would you describe it?

Maurizio: Basically, all our works develop from our concept of instantaneous composition. We've been using the same approach since we recorded *Landscapes…* together: we simply enter our Space Room and let things happen. No pre-defined schemes, but a free alchemy of gtrs and percussions sounds…something very difficult to explain, yet so natural. The magic consists in a mix of rational/intellectual and instinctual actions, where we just kind of make sounds follow their own intrinsic movements in space; each sound guided so as to create a unique instant-shaped texture. This structure develops each time into a different direction, each sound being supposed to live the instant.

Do you have many lyrics, or are your works mainly instrumental?

Roberto: Though our works are often mainly instrumental, during the last year vocals and lyrics have become more and more important for us, if not crucial to some of our records. *The Rest is Silence* double LP (MCIAA's 2004 debut on Eclipse Records) is the perfect example, and we consider it as one of our key-works. We used instantaneous composition as a foundation for stratified musical textures, where the vocals/lyrics were really basic: we made them sound like an old folk-blues 78 rpm broadcast from Jupiter directly into the listener's brain. Despite all conventional methods of singing, we have a peculiar approach to vocals too; at this moment, I'm particularly into the use of improvised vocals, mostly without words, like kinds of spaced-out primitive blues, shaped the same way we make our sounds flow. Wordless lyrics are setting singing free from its terrestrial chains. MCIAA hate any sort of chains.

Do you play live much?

Maurizio: Actually, during these past years we have not played live much, focusing more on performing in our Space Room and on doing records and projects (for gallery-spaces too). We played some gigs in Italy, France and Switzerland and we played several times with Sonic Youth in Italy and Europe, and of course this is always great: last August we opened their European tour in Geneva (CH) at the prestigious Victoria Hall (a 1800s theatre considered the temple of classical music in Switzerland). SY and MCIAA were the first rock bands performing there! We owe them the best and most satisfying live experience to date…Now, MCIAA having some international releases already out and many more as forthcoming, we're planning on touring Europe in early 2005 and USA in Spring…

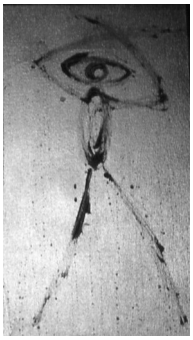
Is your best work done in the recording studio?

Maurizio: We never worked in a proper recording studio. We always record all MCIAA's stuff by ourselves on a cheap 8-tracks at our Space Room; then we mix and edit everything without using any kind of computer program; we only go to a studio to make the final master. Sometimes (*The alien cd-r attack series - vol.I* and *The first flame of tomorrow*) we release live performances, with no overdubs / outtakes.

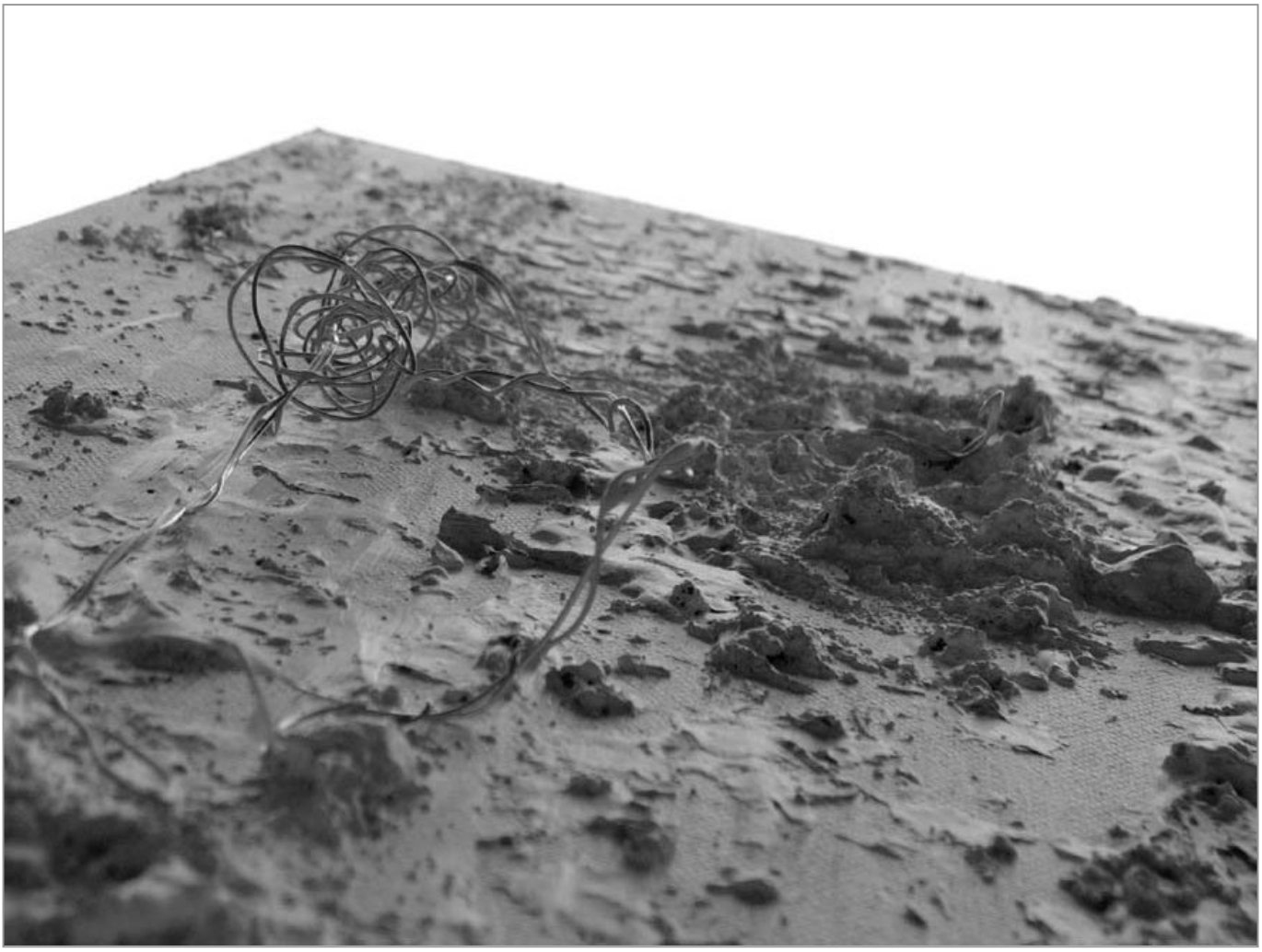
How long have you have been releasing limited-edition recordings? Are all the packages hand-made? Is it a lot of work to create them? Why include original artworks with the package?

Maurizio: Since forming, our need for an easy and direct way of releasing stuff which could fit our creative urgency led us to set up Opax Records: we really love working on special art-editions, though they need a lot of time and energy to be created. All we want to do is to offer something that could not be identifiable neither as a proper record nor as an art-object: a product being both things. In the era of jewel-cased cds, we are simply offering what we would like best to receive ourselves: music together with other forms of art, as a unique, handmade, highly-collectible and maybe rare-to-find item (things easy to find are not so exciting!).

Roberto: Doing our Opax Records art-packaging, I mainly use the same materials I usually utilize in my paintings / drawings and in the installations I make with Maurizio, all kinds of materials, including earth and space fragments (some winters ago, my brother and I found some meteor's splinters in a remote zone of the Western Alps…). We started working with the cd-r format, while now, on the occasion of our new *From the earth to the Spheres* split LPs series, I'm working on a 31x31 cm wooden surface format, and it's really fantastic! I often paint them in the silence of the night, by candlelight. You should see my large dimension paintings as well as my works on glass, 'cause everything comes from there. Now we're trying to make some of our works visible through the 'space art' page of our website…I'd like people (maybe also from the other side of the ocean) to be able to order some of them directly, 'cause 'till now my only painting which is in the USA is the one measuring 10 feet high which Thurston brought with him in NYC.



Who are your customers for these artefacts?



Roberto: We think the customers for these artefacts must surely be people who love contemporary art and music, people with a creative attitude and creative interest; we know some of them are artists too, but most of them are humans with open minds and open ears, maybe unsatisfied by the too-large proliferation of industrial CDs put inside standard jewel-cases.

Do they sell well?

Roberto: Slowly, through these years, we found the way of distributing and selling our stuff, getting the money for releasing new Opax issues; this happens thanks to the special alien faith and support of very kind spirits like Ed Hardy and his extraterrestrial Eclipse mailorder, the Yod Collective guys and especially Chris Corsano, Chris Freeman of Fusetron mailorder, Jos Lesueur and his French Naninani mailorder, Heather and David Leigh (Taurpis Tula) and their new Volcanic Tongue mailorder, among others…

How many releases have there been so far, including those on your own label?

Maurizio: Up to now (Nov 2004) on Opax Records we've released 11 CDRs and a side-project private press LP, plus the first 3 volumes of the *From the earth to the Spheres* split-LP series; The *Landscapes of an electric city / Hypnotic spaces* 3-sided LP went out on Ecstatic Peace, *Il segno* LP on Starlight Furniture Co., *The rest is silence* double LP on Eclipse Records and *From the earth to the Spheres* vol.1 (T.Moore / MCIAA) CD issue on Very Friendly / Cargo Records; then there's the next-month-forthcoming *When the windmill's whirl dies* Eclipse LP.

Is all of your artwork and imagery related to outer space and aliens?

Roberto: Many of our artworks are related to outer space, and a recurrent icon of my own paintings/installations is an alien. But it is not a so-explicit imagery; I conceive the alien as an oblique symbolism regarding a psychic/ existential state, which I adopt from the particular to the universal; I mean, it's like your reflection in a hall of mirrors…

Do you believe in the existence of UFOs or extra-terrestrials?

Roberto: Do we believe in the existence of extra-terrestrials? We definitely DO BELIEVE!

How did collaborations with Sonic Youth and Thurston Moore come about?

Maurizio: Well, after we met Sonic Youth in Torino on the occasion of MCIAA's very first gig as support band to their show, we started keeping in touch; Thurston seemed very

interested in our project, and we felt very happy and honoured when he said he intended to release our debut improv-recording as a duo *Landscapes…* on his own Ecstatic Peace label, one of our favourite labels indeed! The album came out as a 3-sided LP 'cause Thurston definitely wanted to include three alien rock-songs we originally issued as a private cd-r edition of 12 copies…the *Hypnotic spaces* EP worked very well after 2 sides of space-improv sounds! As I said above, during these years we played several times with SY and, when possible, spent time together, especially with Thurston, so we both consider them as friends; their interest and support means a lot to us. When we set up the *From the earth to the Spheres* split LPs series, we immediately thought of Thurston to start the series, and he agreed enthusiastically…

Are there any other collaborations planned?

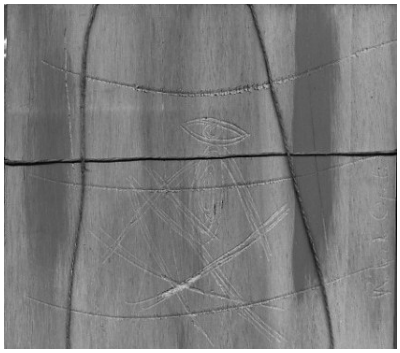
Roberto: The idea behind our space-art ltd. edition of 100 copies only-vinyl split LPs series on Opax Records was to create a space of collaboration between MCIAA and some of the artists/bands we highly esteem; we were already in touch with some of them, like Jackie-o Motherfucker (Tom Greenwood had previously asked MCIAA some stuff for a U-Sound Archive forthcoming volume), Christina Carter, Thuja and Seymour Glass of Glands of External Secretion; we met Christian Marclay in 2002 on the occasion of the Torino Biennual of Young Artists, since he was member of the artistic committee and MCIAA got involved in as outsider artists; Jim O'Rourke…well, he's Jim! We never got in contact with Double Leopards before, but when they replied they were very excited about the project.

Maurizio: We're very happy 'cause this series got a big response both from people and press, and also because Very Friendly/ Cargo Records UK is going to issue all volumes in cd format, in order to make the sounds more widely available to the people.

What have other people said about your music? Do you listen to what they say?

Maurizio: Actually we don't really get influenced by what other people may think or say about our music. I mean, beyond one's own tastes and subjective way of looking at art and music, I believe you have to follow whatever you feel as right for yourself and which may give sense to your own life. Of course, we think that anyone doing art needs to communicate concepts and feelings to people, and to know that these can be understood as well.

Can you say something about the development of your personal musical style?



Maurizio: During the last six years, MCIAA evolved their music from a free-noisy nebulae sound to a more psych-ambient-folk-oriented style. Anyway, we're always in transition 'cause, as Henry Miller once wrote, we believe that only a fool would try to have the same experience twice. Our sound of today belongs to the present, and the present of today is the past of tomorrow.

How has Torino influenced your music?

Roberto: Torino and its spirit has always influenced all our works; it's a very peculiar city…it's been the Kings Savoia's residence for so many years, that it still keeps a certain majesty; architecturally it's similar to Paris, though its atmosphere is darker and more surrealist. Its typical large avenues full of fallen leaves and early-morning fog during fall/winter time give you a sense of romantic desolation…From our balcony, at sunset we can see its skyline made of early 1900s dead chimneys, surrounded by the ghosts of the Alps. You can have a concrete idea of all this looking at the cover and the full-inner photo of our new forthcoming *When the windmill's whirl dies* LP on Eclipse Records (out January 2005): I took them with an old b/w film-camera last winter, just before black fell enveloping everything…Sometimes we love Torino. Sometimes we hate Torino. Anyway, we have it under our skin.

What motivates you as people to make art?

Roberto: I believe we were just born to be artists and to make art. It's not a real choice. It's all we can do. It's all we're able to do at all, 'cause we simply cannot do anything else but this. Sometimes it's hard to accept: I mean, you feel isolated…Art is the only true part of yourself, you can't escape this…it's your destiny, your damnation…'the sign'…you're marked and you know you will pay for this. Maybe all this could sound a bit extreme, but it's just the truth. We never chose to be artists and to make art! Life without art doesn't mean so much to us… Art speaks of the questions with no answers. Art is total freedom. Art is the Howl. Art is Space. Art runs against the direction of time. Art is your life when all is over. Please, believe MCIAA: these are not empty words…this is pure ALIEN FAITH! □

www.mycatisanalien.com

Music from JAPAN

Enkidu
Hasselt
FRANCE TURTLES' DREAM / ABRUITSECRET TDCD-03 CD (2003)

Following last year's momentous Chie Mukai release *L'energie de l'existence*, here's yet another great example of striking free music realised with the help of Sei-ichi Yamamoto on guitar (and flute, voice and electronics) and Eric Cordier on the hurdy-gurdy. Entire CD is a single 67-minute improvisation recorded (as part of a tour?) in Belgium November 2002.

Chie Mukai herself plays the kokyu, drums, percussion…she also sings, and dances.

Without wishing to reiterate stupid clichés about what music made by women might be, this remains very feminine music to these ears, which is to say it's filled with compassion and love rather than anger and aggression, and creates an enveloping womb-like space around a listener. Surrender yourself to the entire disc in one sitting, and it's a fantastic experience. The music seems to carry on into eternity with superb plucking, droning and moaning effects; the players worry away at their notes, with the manic drive of a Japanese print-maker rendering the exact shape of a cherry-blossom branch or the perfect shade of orange for a sunset…obsessive, perfectionist genius, and a superb harmony of intent.

This record has little to do with current minimalist / reduced playing preoccupations, although it remains in line with the aesthetics of the A Bruit Secret label which issues a good deal of important contemporary quiet Japanese music; although as a splinter sub-label, perhaps Turtles' Dream caters to the more romantic longings that burn inside all human spirits. Certainly, Chie lives by her own lights; both she and Otomo have it in common that they learned at the feet of improvising masters, in her case the Taj Mahal Travellers and in his case the guitarist Masayuki Takayanagi. Mukai always succeeds in creating timeless, grand and ageless music and is not stuck in a 'preservation society' of some sort.

It's also quite unlike any other record I've heard by her before; it gets wilder and wilder as the trio catch fire, almost as intense as free jazz or psychedelic guitar noodling, with incredible sounds pouring forth from mostly acoustic instruments, and almost holy in its intensity of devoted ceremony. Recommended therefore to all lovers of Krautrock, improvisation, traditional Japanese music or simply those who love mystery and beauty…Chie Mukai is the quiet genius who just keeps on giving! One of the best improvisation records released this year!

ED PINSENT 26/10/2004
www.abruitsecret.com

eX-Girl
Endangered Species
USA ALTERNATIVE TENTACLES RECORDS VIRUS 313 CD (2004)

This release is abetted by one Hoppy Kamiyama who himself looks as if he could pass as a member of a girl group, and whose musical genius lies chiefly in slamming together established music genres like punk,

hard rock with a bit of garage, classical violins, spaced-out electronics and tribal drumming into a commercially compatible whole. This all-female trio from Japan presents *Endangered Species* on Jello Biafra's Alternative Tentacles Records label, which gives you some idea of who and what they're aiming for. For three girls who originally could not play any musical instruments when they formed eX-Girl in 1997, they have come a long way. I understand there have been line-up changes and only Kirilola remains of the original trio. Now we have all three playing guitars, drums and synths with help from at least one ex-member Fuzuki who sits in on drums on 3 tracks.

All 11 songs are amazingly different in style in some way. In 'Pretty U Ugly', the band presents as a sassy hard-rocking version of the B-52s girls; 'PUJEVA' combines a Kraftwerkian rhythm with slashing guitar and singing ranging from the strident to the wacky. The trademark bombastic drumming appears on 'New Pulse'. On 'Rocket Keronian', Kirilola and Co remind us that they're really visitors from Planet Kero ('kero' is similar to the Japanese term for the sound frogs make) and plead with Keronian 5 to come to Earth to cure their hiccups. (Keronian 5 appears on the CD sleeve artwork as well.) 'Venus vs Gas Onna' gives us a hard-edged ABBA over mostly mellow keyboards-based music. The girls really come into their own on songs like 'Pretty U Ugly' and 'Resonance' where they rock hard and sing catchy choruses. There are a couple of tracks in the 2nd half of the CD where the music tips eX-Girl just a bit into experimental electronics territory but the music is essentially indie hard rock / punk with garage touches and electronics trimmings.

If there are criticisms to be made (and remember the record label they're on), eX-Girl need songs with more distinctive and catchy melodies where they can occasionally go operatic - their singing is often very strident and haranguing. A short track where they can sing a cappella with maybe very minimal accompaniment could have spiced up the music without alienating the target US college student audience. The hard guitar sound is generic and gets wearying - more synth or electronic accompaniment (but not too much so) would have been welcome. Some people may be disappointed that the lyrics are mostly in English and it's possible that some of eX-Girl's charm was lost when they opted to sing in a foreign language. One other thing that needs mentioning - more space cadet songs about Planet Kero and its froggy inhabitants! Yes please! More, more, more! Kero, Kero, Kero!!!

JENNIFER HOR
www.alternativetentacles.com

Ikuro Takahashi
Anoyonodekigoto
USA SIWA #10 VINYL LP (2004)

An absolutely lovely record of abstract chattering electronic noise, just the way we like it – continual, insistent, remorseless, and fascinating. The A side is one continuous piece called 'Furio Bon No Kubo #1', and it's a massive chirping workout like being devoured alive by a huge swarm of electronic cicadas. A true hymn to nature, in a way that the Japanese do best. Let it build inside your head until you have an entire imaginary Japanese garden, through which you may wander by the light of the oriental moon.

The B side has 'Stuttering and Scattering Seeds', which seems to depict a guided tour through some madcap reptile house, an insane asylum for Gila monsters, Monitors and Axolotls. Perched on top of this nightmare structure is a free-form bird sanctuary, filled with rare captive specimens. The peeping, whooping, squawking and grating sound never stops, as the artists deploys his never-ending short-fuse tapes loops and electronic sequences with deathly precision. Wow. Another track on B side is 'Furio Bon No Kubo #2', a reprise of the fabulous A side, this time from a live performance. This one is like a miniature car alarm on a Dinky toy car – 300 of them – all going off at once. I think it's the simplicity of it that makes it so successful, the judicious and intelligent use of repetition, the basic yet sumptuous sound it makes.

Anoyo No Dekigoto (which translates roughly as Happenings in the Other World) is an improvised dance / performance project. Although on this record we only hear the shrill electronic mechanics of Takahashi, Yoko Muronoi is credited with dance. Her silent contributions add to the physicality of this sound-art. It's not a thing that you or I could imagine dancing to, but this LP is just the tip of the iceberg; the deep, communicative system that this duo have (they're worked together for five years) is palpably evident on every second of this extraordinary work. It's a record with a very full sound, one that insinuates its very real presence into your room almost immediately, and stays there, lingeringly. It feels like the entire air around you is filled with floating bird seed. Afterwards you need to sweep up to remove the sonic debris.

Gorgeous art object record, pressed in limited run of 300 copies in white vinyl in a beautiful silk-screened cover. Who is Ikuro? 'A legendary figure on the Japanese underground who has previously played with High Rise, Fushitsusha and many others. Working with sampler, percussion, small objects and a multitude of wind-up, oscillating noisemakers, he creates a unique and unsettling sonic field.' Destined to be a favourite with me, this beautiful metaphysical statement deserves a place in your home too.

ED PINSENT 14/11/2004
www.siwarecords.com

Ghost
Hypnotic Underworld
USA DRAG CITY DC249CD (2004)

My hippie brain just loves this record! Now the rest of me that's not a recovering Pink Floyd addict can get straight to business... this album is a highly ambitious mix of improv, thrash, psychedelia and all-too-often plodding 70s-styled prog rock that achieves an epic

feel, only to throw it away. Ghost get carried away with the melodic proggy stuff when they should be paying attention to little details, like maintaining the appropriate groggy psychedelic ambience and the background special effects. And when they fall into the boring prog hard rock biz, that tends to highlight Masaki Batoh's deficiencies as a vocalist when the band should be working around and supporting his singing so that his voice can be a strength and essential part of the group's style. Too many moments arise - as in 'Feed' and the first part of 'Ganagmanag' - where Ghost coast along in a (dare I say?) lazy 70s adult-oriented rock way and the hippie brain, reared on fast and heavy music, aches for the band to break out in some crazed heavy psychedelic krautrock jamfest complete with Damo Suzuki musings on the state of the world. No such luck!

Grumbling aside, the *Hypnotic Underworld* quadrilogy featuring the long but excellent improv 1st movement and the very short thrashy 4th movement has the best Ghost-composed music; of the rest of the album, 'Hazy Paradise' (a cover of a song by a 60s Dutch group) and 'Dominoes - Celebration for the Gray Days' (a Syd Barrett / Pink Floyd composition) are the best. Quite telling that Ghost do other people's songs better than their own! 'Hazy Paradise' has a glazed-eyed Floydian atmosphere where Batoh's fragile vocals actually work due to the dream-like crystalline arrangements; pity about that over-extended guitar break coming down sledgehammer-like. 'Dominoes ...' gives us Batoh as dreamy troubadour, then as an unworldly angel receding high into the firmament during the heavenly organ-dominated finale. Those much-missed background effects return, and the album regains the epic quality it should have sustained throughout. Then it all ends. Oh well.

Because each track is dominated by a different style of music (for example, track 10, 'Holy High', starts off as promisingly Comus-like dark folk but stumbles into Jethro Tull lameness), the album doesn't sound unified. But there is a definite theme that explains why the recording works its way from improv (representing the chaos of the physical plane of existence) to thrash (the release of the soul into supposedly higher realms of matter and existence which sag around tracks 7 to 10), and so on. It would have been more interesting if Ghost had incorporated some aspects of traditional Japanese music, religion and mythology into this recording; the result might have been more musically and thematically unified, and might reveal something of the Buddhist attitude about the impermanence of life and detachment from material things, not to mention the ideas such an approach could have engendered.

Anyway, the hippie brain still loves this record from start to finish even with the many shortcomings it has picked out, and predicts this will be close to topping many people's Best Records of 2004 lists. Just goes to show that once a Pink Floyd addict, always a ... This admission will get me kicked off *The Sound Projector*. (Sob!)

JENNIFER HOR
Drag City Incorporated, PO Box 476867, Chicago, IL, 60647, United States

K.K. Null
Ovo
ITALY BAR LA MUERTE RECORDS
BAR 25 3" CD (2003)

Short but powerful minidisc contains fragments of twisted electronic rhythm genius, very much in the Boredoms mode…mad gibbering rhythms with loopy twiddling noises and tuneless synth wheezes piled on top. Three tracks of scorching music belched up from the infernal nightclubs of insane monkey dancers and remixed by the fictitious DJ miniwagonwheel. 'Protostar' is almost a 'pop' tune (that's if you like pop music created by half-mad demons), whereas 'Claws' shows the aggressive and relentless side of Null we know and love…'Tails' seems to have additional guitar, vocal and saxophone loops, and amounts to a pounding attack of frenzied idiocy. Japanese player Null has long history of guitar abuse, but this collection seems to be built entirely out of samples…but with what inspired dynamic force he hath clashed his explosive elements together. Something of an oddity. The cartoon images of amputated and bleeding women on the cover are unnecessary though, and spoil enjoyment slightly.

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004
www.barlamuerte.com

Kousokuya
Kousokuya
JAPAN PSF RECORDS PSFD-132
CD (2003)

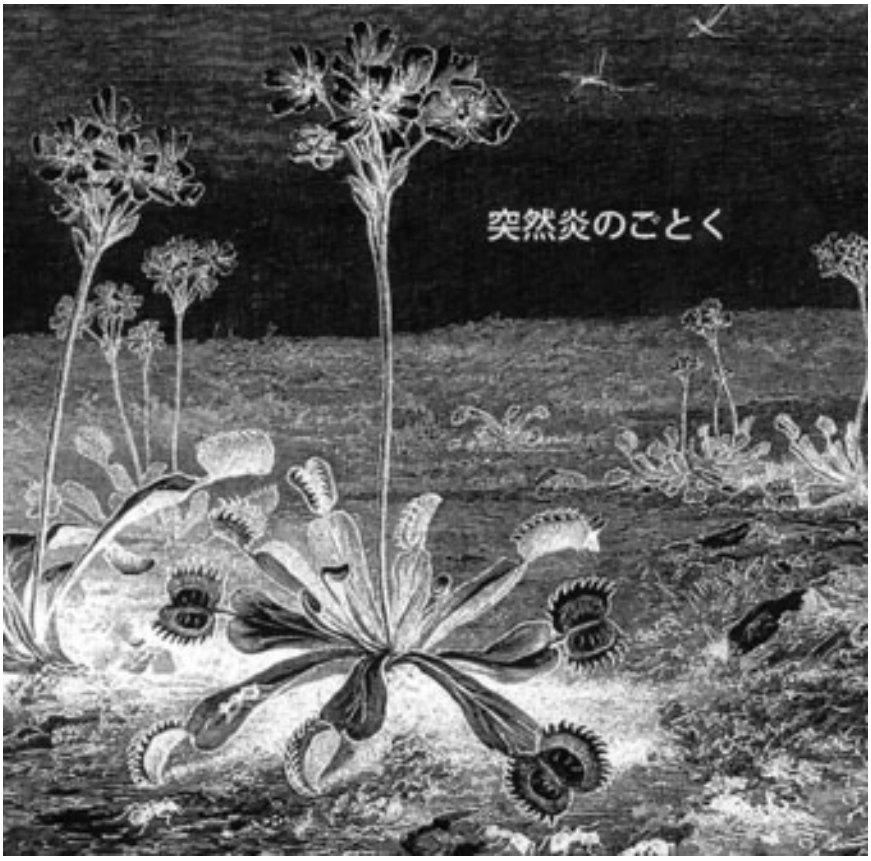
A dark doom-laden heavy psychedelic rock affair is this, Kousokuya's first album, originally released in LP format in 1991 and now made available on CD by our friends at PSF Records. No beating about the bush here, this intense album demands your serious attention which will be well rewarded if doomy metal is your scene.

The opener 'The miracle' plunges you straight into the thick repetitive bass rhythm, full of sinister intent, and then into a deep cavernous space where guitar, drums and bass pursue parallel improv journeys punctuated by bassist Mick's high-pitched boyish vocals which convey anguish or resignation. The singing may well be the most memorable aspect of this recording: weird and unearthly, the voice of a corrupted angel cast into a hole to spend aeons atoning for a terrible crime. Another aspect of the music that will impress is the band's use of silence both as backdrop and as an essential element in the music particularly on the third track 'Removal' where, combined with minimal repetitive bass, it creates a suspenseful atmosphere. On this song, guitarist Kaneko and drummer Takahashi play more for effect and emphasis than because they are in a rock band, and so there's not a melody, at least not in the traditional sense, to be heard; the track becomes a mini-psychodrama centred around the lyrics.

On all tracks, the lyrics verge on the existential. The tracks can be very long - at least three of them notch up 10 minutes and over - and on some songs there is a fair amount of heavy metal plodding, especially on 'The dark spot' which is the least interesting track because it's the most conventionally rock-oriented. Kaneko puts in more than his fair share of fast fingering and feedback fireworks on all pieces. Another rock-oriented piece is the bonus track 'Suffering broken song' with rough adult-sounding vocals and the instruments all playing in time together. Although Kousokuya do the Black Sabbath heavy metal act well with a uniquely Japanese touch, they are much better when they break away from the usual rock structures and conventions and enter territory more expressionist and shamanist; in this respect, 'The miracle' and 'Removal' are the best tracks.

A collaboration with fellow heavy psychedelic rock traveller Keiji Haino in Fushitsusha mode must surely be on the cards: given that he has shared recording space with Boris, Ruins (a ho-hum effort) and Musica Transonic (what a waste of his talent), Haino-san is more than overdue for an appointment with this band. Four Men In Black - now that's an act we want to see!

JENNIFER HOR
Modern Music (PSF Records), Terada Bldg, 2F, 2-45-11 Matsubara, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo 156, Japan



LSD-March

Suddenly, like flames

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG 064 CD [2004]

Great full-length CD of Japanese psychedelic rock from this fab trio, new to me; they only recently came my way via the excellent compilation *The Night Gallery*, on Alchemy Records, where they have three strong cuts…the leader and brains behind the gang is Shinsuke Michishita who sings and plays a mean axe…with able support from Masami Kawaguchi on bass, and Ikuro Takahashi on drums. Here's six songs, one instrumental…and all their music has a limpid beauty, an ethereal charm. Recording quality is roughed-up to lend that bootleg feeling, adding a patina of scuzziness that reacts interestingly with the lyrical content which is preoccupied with beauty, death and pain.

Pre-psych garage punk bands and West coast psychedelic excess in equal amounts have fuelled their fertile imaginations. On 'The Lamp' the band plays like a kiddie-toy version of The Jesus and Mary Chain, while the singer complains 'I'm almost diced, soaked with a corpse' in a world-weary voice accepting of his fate. 'Black Bouquet' is particularly reminiscent of a lost Pebbles track, only slowed down to an agonisingly dreary rate, splashed everywhere with acid-drenched guitar licks, and a lugubrious vocal moan. 'When I walk under a sky of despair,' begins his lament, sounding as though his entire head has been dipped in wet concrete. There are tremendous studio effects on 'A bud of flesh', gaining that same 'distant' guitar sound reminiscent of the classic track 'Love At Psychedelic Velocity'. On the title track, it's a whole other band, but with the same leader, where the guest organ player adds additional gothic-styled freakiness. The LP shifts uptempo for what would have been side 2 of the original LP. The band start to writhe like snakes, while the murky sound damps down their energy, till the trio resembles a gigantic monster thrashing around in a swamp!

According to Alan Cummings, whose meticulous research is packed into a fine sleeve note here, this record originally existed as a white-vinyl LP in 2002, 300 copies pressed up on Shinsuke's own White Elephant label. The combo formed in 1997, when Shinsuke was only 17! The drummer's played with High-Rise, Fushitsusha, Ché-SHIZU, and Maher Shalal Hash Baz. Alan can clearly hear a Les Rallizes Denudes influence on the first side of the original LP, where the vocals hover 'halfway between croon and moan but still just out of tune'. Their relative obscurity, Cummings assures us, may be due to fact that they aren't based in Tokyo or Osaka, but an interesting place called Himeji – a Japanese town with a medieval castle popular with tourists, and somewhat unlikely zone of a prospering psych scene at Club Mushroom. Far out! Lots to recommend this American issue, right down to the splendid botany text-book illustration samples on the cover; I'll go nuts trying to collect their other records now (although Siwa Records recently issued *Shindara Jigoku*, SR4002, which I ordered)…energising, melancholy music, weird and off-kiltre, highly desirable.

ED PINSENT 29/10/2004
www.lvd.4mg.com

Sayaka Imai

Mahiru-no-yume

USA DETECTOR MP-27 CD (2003)

Want an entree into the world of Japanese avant-garde psychedelic pop? With a touch of noise guitar and a dash of some nice dreamy ambient soundscape? Look no farther then than this album, cooked up by one Sayaka Imai, guitarist singer for the band Little Fujiko who with her hair in schoolgirl braids barely looks older than my 12 year-old niece. *Mahiru-no-yume* ('Midday Dream') is a very assured if at times twee work with strong and very catchy melodies covering the style gamut from acoustic folk to psychedelic bubblegum to Merzbow For Minors.

Easily the best track on this album is the title piece, in its dreamy psychedelic pop version: the seductive ambience, surreal and child-like lyrics and an unforgettable rhythm that surges through the brain and imprints itself into the cerebellum's deepest recesses rule the day. Rated on a logarithmic scale of 1 to 10 on the drool-o-meter, this song hits way past 13. Later on the album, Imai attempts a folk version of the piece with cello, drums and piano accompaniment but the result unfortunately is lumbering and awkward, and drags Imai's singing down so she sounds unintentionally mournful.

Of the other tracks featuring Imai's babywoman vocals, 'Sutekina...!' ('Wonderful...!') is the stand-out: a light bouncy tune with the electronic tones and guinea pig whistles to match and surreal lyrics expressing a child's joy of the world. 'Star' features jangly 60's electric guitar - very nice! Then there are the three instrumental tracks of which 'Traum' and 'Puls music' (sic) deserve mention: 'Traum' is a formless, shifting continuum of sound through which Imai's sighs pass along with drones and sculptured sound - the effect is pleasantly dreamy although the piece is perhaps a little drawn out after the halfway point. 'Puls music' features ongoing squalling or rumbling guitar noise feedback hovering over a driving, pulsing rhythm and slight creepy tonal effects - this track definitely needs to be a bit longer! It might not make a future Susan Lawly compilation *Extreme Noise from Japanese Women*, but it's certainly an easy-listening introduction to noise.

The artist who springs to mind for a comparison with Imai is Haco: both artists effortlessly bridge the divide between pop and experimentalism with an attitude of child-like innocence which also paradoxically hints at deeper emotions within, Haco being more expert at this than Imai. The younger artist certainly bears watching whether she continues solo or with Little Fujiko; Mahiru-no-yume shows there is a great talent to come.

JENNIFER HOR
triode833a@yahoo.com

Tsurubami
Kaina
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD-023 CD [2004]

This is a side project emanating from the very prolific workshop of Acid Mothers Temple. A few years ago, I seem to recall, the ears of the world were awash with CDRs and small-run private press recordings documenting the dealings and doings of AMT and their associated spin-offs...but I never heard any of these, so whether vital recordings or mere effulgence of self-indulgence I can't say. Naturally enough, this release is led by the fingers of Kawabata Makoto, who plays the guitar here and produced and recorded the whole enchilada...plus there's Higashi Hiroshi (another AMT member in good standing) on the bass, while young Emi Nobuko sprawls across her drumkit displaying emotions ranging from disinterested cymbal-crashing to enthusiastic bass-drum thumping.

To be honest, I've kind of lost interest in following all the twists and turns of AMT, but this record seems to be guided more by a sense of ritual performance and some vague spiritual ambitions rather than the dirgey folk-psych collective approach of the mother-ship band. However, Tsurubami prove that they too are equally capable of aimless meandering. Coming over as ponderous and heavy, the two quiet tracks here are extremely slow in their build-up and even slower in delivering their pay-off. 'Hitsumyou O Gotoshite' amounts to a long and pointless drifting episode across cosmic clouds of purple dust, much like Ash Ra Tempel or The Cosmic Jokers working out in slow motion. An ethereal, centreless droning event with some vague pulsing in the background, which might be Hiroshi tugging at his strings like a cat toying with a half-dead mouse. 'Seiki Sae Miezu' is, if anything, even more shapeless – the three players seem to be ignoring each other for the most part, as they explore three different tributaries of the same mighty river. It becomes a long trip in a twilight land, perhaps even a trip to the Underworld, where an aura of menace lurks in each deceptive corner. If you can endure this much echoed-guitar effect, you may want to pursue this long track to its conclusion, even if it infuriates at first.

These dippy and drifty cuts sandwich 'Kujiru', a live performance which is simply loud high-speed psychedelic rock delivered in the totally convincing way that only obsessive Japanese can manage. A blistering cataclysm of cavernous guitar yawps, supported by thudding drum attacks and bass guitar plucked by the mitts of a gigantic, malevolent robot monster...despite loud volume, this is just as much a free-form trip out as the rest of the disc, difference being suggestion of powerful drugs which drive musicians and give instant hit to the brain – and stay there, relentlessly executing their mind-damaging hallucinogenic programme. Recorded in 2000 and 2002 at studio and live venues, and wrapped in suitably murky colour photographs.

ED PINSENT 18/09/2004
PO Box 2631, Providence, RI 02906, USA
www.lvd.4mg.com

Fushitsusha
(Untitled)
JAPAN PSF RECORDS PSF-D 15-16 2 x CD (1991)

No doubt about it, this double album is an essential Fushitsusha release and by implication an essential Keiji Haino release and an essential PSF release. Ranging from hard rock (Disc 2/Track 7 which sounds a bit like a noisy Rolling Stones tribute and is not very interesting) to industrial machine debauchery/destruction (much of Disc 1 and part of Disc 2) to moments of introspection (Disc 1/Track 4 and part of Disc 2), the music is steeped in Fushitsusha's own brand of deep intensity, much of which presumably obtains from Haino's own troubled little black soul, and this compensates for the music's repetitive nature. It's also less free-form than later Fushitsusha efforts. The cavernous and often overwhelming production (this is a live album as well) enhances the music's intensity and Haino's distinctive singing and yowling. Because the lyrics are printed in Japanese only, we Westerners can't fully share in Haino's torment and despair (though with all the attention he gets, his celebrity status can't be all that bad - or maybe it is all that bad; it's not doing his relationships with some of his young female fans any good) but certainly our eardrums and the brain cells next to them feel the pain.

All the tracks except the very last (the aforementioned D2T7) are good and highly evocative of what we may assume to be Haino's unhinged emotional state at the time (the delirious and hypnotic Disc 2/Track 1 which traces a downward spiral on guitar is the best in this respect) and illustrate the organic being of Fushitsusha in which each musician, paying close attention to his fellows, allows himself and his creativity to be subsumed into the Fushitsusha entity. (Though there may very well have been times when it was in danger of becoming Haino's backing band and therefore the shadow personality of Haino himself.) On this double CD set, the repetitions of melodies and riffs save the music from becoming self-indulgent and balance out the lead guitar torture; a certain minimalist rigour is also present in the sonic over-kill.

Clocking in at about 140 minutes, this is a long and exhausting album. As Black albums go (and maybe also White albums and even Grey albums) this surprisingly untitled record must surely be the Blackest of them all, by a very long shot.

JENNIFER HOR
PSF, Terada Bldg, 2F, 2-45-11 Matsubara, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo 156, Japan

Absolut Null Punkt
Absolut Null Punkt
USA IMPORTANT RECORDS IMPREC029 CD (2004)

Expect no less than a concentrated aural barrage combining heavy rock, industrial, free jazz, improv and glitch electronics on the eardrums from the dynamic duo of Kazuyuki Kishino Null and original Fushitsusha drummer Seijiro Murayama. All 6 tracks on this album were recorded live at 3 venues in Tokyo and Osaka (the Osaka tracks taking place at Bears venue) with 2 tracks being further 'decomposed' in the studio by KK Null. The best tracks tend to be the short ones: track 2 features a spectacular sticks workout from Murayama in an atmosphere not far removed from that inhabited by Fushitsusha and Keiji Haino, and made monstrous by KK Null's guitar / nullsonic device. Tracks 1 - 5 are all quite different in the way Null and Murayama trade lead and support roles with some tracks emphasising a particular aspect of the music: track 3 is very rhythmic; track 4 seems to explore extreme polarities of sound and texture. Each track also has a disciplined, even severe sensibility (track 5 is notable in this respect, the space becoming an element in the work) that Haino-san would recognise. The really long track, at 21 minutes, isn't too bad: Murayama brings in tubes to blow on while continuing to hammer away at the skins or maybe Null takes over the drumming duties for a change, in addition to guitar, nullsonic, microphone and vocal duties (mostly of the yelping and crooning sort). The latter half of the piece is less interesting than the first half and is quite repetitive, and some editing or studio 'decomposition' would have tightened it up. The artwork on the CD, showing a white lily against a background of darker lilies, seems to illustrate in a visual way some aspects of ANP's style; if you listen to ANP carefully, you will find rare beauty and grace amid the noise. This being an Important Records release however, don't expect even moderately elaborate packaging with lots of pretty pictures! Come on, Important Records, I'm sure by now that you can afford better presentation for your artists' records!

JENNIFER HOR
www.ImportantRecords.com
www.kknull.com

NOISES FROM THE USA UNDERGROUND

Sun City Girls
Carnival Folklore Resurrection: Radio One and Two
USA ABDUCTION CFR 11/12 2 x CD (2003)

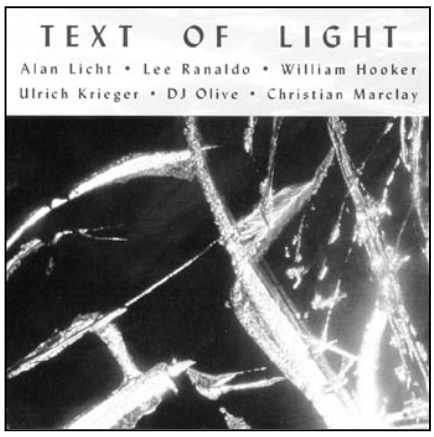
Wild, WILD music and sound here…could be said that it's an atypical Sun City Girls release, but then what isn't? I always say this, but the more I hear of this band, the less I understand. I've acquired a fair few LPs, CDs and related materials (including obscure side projects and solo records) by these fellows now, and have been trying in vain to discern any real pattern among them. Every record could be by a different band. Sometimes it's hard to believe that they've done so much, and I haven't even scratched the surface yet. I wonder how completists are managing? This two-CD set comprises the 11th and 12th entities in their *Carnival Folklore Resurrection* series, a sequence of discs typified by its complete lack of sequentiality. Better be prepared for almost anything; you genuinely don't know what you're gonna get next…

This disorientation programme continues here in the two discs, which are 'Radio Collage #1' and 'Radio Collage #2', both originally broadcast on the amazing USA radio station WFMU. Over 29 tracks, the first reaction of listener is one of utter stupefaction, but a few further spins allows one to assimilate the apparent mayhem and enjoy the exciting confusion. Alan Bishop of the Girls has proved he's no slouch at the collage-game (see his *Radio Palestine* CD recently out on Sublime Frequencies), and though the aim here is to maintain the shock-suspense-surprise levels at fever-pitch at all times, their collage technique doesn't call attention to itself. I mean the material speaks for itself, and the splices remain largely unnoticeable. 'Krung Thep cut-up' alone is enough to make you doubt evidence of your own ears; the source material alone is far-out enough by itself, but liberties have been taken to enhance its weirdness. What can it all mean? A rainbow of exotica, further evidence of their abiding interest in the sounds and music of Eastern climes.

Thereafter, the musical odyssey is merely a surreal, astonishing melange of instrumental guitar music, field recordings, voice samples, answerphone messages, noise, radio static, electronic experiments, prose readings...the assorted jumble of fragments create the sort of startling impressions and sheer energy that you wish were present in the more – erm - rarified end of this part of the experimental spectrum. Sun City Girls, naturally, remain uncategorisable mavericks and allow their larger-than-life personalities to shine forth, an attitude which sweeps away much pretentious guff; on the other hand, large American egos leave a stamp too. There's quite a lot of spoken-word pieces by drummer Charles Gocher, with his unique beatnik-styled free-form death-dada acid-trip rants, for example the supremely twisted 'Not In My League', an episode filled with spontaneous, nasty invention.

Through cracked visions, wallowing in mental delirium and psychedelic-influenced hallucinations, SCG allow the true psyche of America (and The Far East!) to leak out through the cracks of perception. Their utterly sardonic and heavily sarcastic slant on just about everything puts the likes of Eugene Chadbourne (and even Frank Zappa) in the shade. The delirium continues on the 2nd disc, spinning further out of control…highlights here include a loud rainfall recording to end them all ('The Rite of Spring Thing'), an overspill of radio collage work, off-tuning static much to the fore, lots of Charles Gocher spoken-word spew, pseudo-ethnic music, pseudo-soundtrack music…Sun City Girls are something of an acquired taste, both infuriating and exhilarating in the same moment, but always full-blooded, full-on, 'out' and played with a great sense of fun. Executed with the help of long-term collaborator Scott Colburn, plus guests Thiri Einsi, Piero Piccioni, Laird Henn and Specs One. Nothing succeeds like excess; this is free music outside the box, dangerous, insane, dynamite.

ED PINSENT 26/10/2004
Abduction Records, PO Box 9611 Seattle, WA 98109 USA
www.suncitygirls.com



Text of Light
Text of Light
USA STARLIGHT FURNITURE CO
★24 CD (2004)

Excellent record this, one that says 'essential purchase' to these ears…it's modernistic free music combo playing, drawn from a pool of five American heavyweights, Lee Ranaldo, Alan Licht, William Hooker, D J Olive, Christian Marclay, plus the esteemed Ulrich Krieger. Krieger is a German saxophonist who has 'done' Cage, and American minimalists like Glass, Reich and Riley on assorted CDs which I've never heard. I assume you know about all the others. Almost like old folks week at the Knitting Factory…guitars, drums, sax and turntables are wielded in stunning ways and this CD documents three performances that feature above players in various striking combinations. All this and the Stan Brakhage 'theme'. Just to stress: neither CD nor performances are intended as a soundtrack to the films of Stan Brakhage; *Text Of Light* happens to be the name of a Brakhage film, and the band have performed their music against backdrop of projected films by said artist, but that's as far as it goes. It's good to see American avant-noisetsers celebrating their heritage, even if Brakhage's work is being reclaimed as some sort of psychedelic experience and re-presented in that context. (One recent example would be the July 2004 fest of noise, films and light shows at the Anthology Film Archives in NYC). For my own tastes I noted that the wonderful *Radio Guitar* CD (see issue 10 of TSP) by Barbara Ess and Peggy Awesh possessed Brakhage-like qualities also. The great man is not in any danger of being overlooked, even if it remains next to impossible to view screenings of his work in London.

On the 2002 'Tonic' performance here, we get the quintet experience (everyone except Marclay), generating 35 minutes of constantly-mutating madness. It's an uncanny blending of full-on sounds and playing styles reaching deeply into zones of remarkable 'otherness'. It's almost impossible to size this music up with both hands; there's simply too much of it happening, all at once. As befits players of such experience, there's real control evident in the energetic workouts, ensuring that they don't burn out early or attempt to say everything in the first two minutes. Accordingly, they all stay the distance for full half-hour…stately, vast-scaled and truly 'out' playing: long fuzzed-up guitar notes clash with feedback drones, propelled by the tripped-out drumming of Hooker, sax blurts and honks from Krieger, and outer-space noise emissions picked up by D J Olive's equipment. In this mix, you can hear all of free jazz, Sun Ra, Xenakis electronic music, Borbetomagus, Glenn Branca…

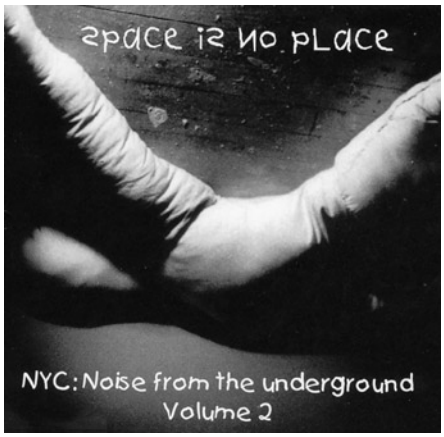
Another record that I'm currently using as an antidote to quiet and slow-to-start improvisation, *Text Of Light* starts in gear immediately, goes straight for the 'hit' like a massive rush of heroin, and stays in the system for a long time, delivering maximal activity that activates the entire nervous system. But it isn't frenetic noise, it isn't speed-of-light soloing or showing off; if anything, the most appropriate model might be the hidden, black energies of Fushitsusha. That would seem to account for the steely blackness of it; *Text Of Light* itself is a pretty 'dark' film in Brakhage's canon.

In September 2002 they did it at the Anthology Film Archives, the NYC equivalent of London's own filmmaker's co-operative (RIP). On this occasion Text Of Light were the two guitarists and D J Olive. Resultant therefrom was a splendid set of shimmering, 'underwater' guitars, strong torrents of feedback, and foreign bodies secreted into the arena via obscure slices of vinyl. A winning combination amounting to 26 minutes of cosmic and infinite string and amplifier work (and with more FX pedals too). The stripped down trio produced a much 'dreamier' sound, especially without the powerhouse drumming of Hooker; like a punkier version of Ash Ra Tempel. In places, this performance is quite stunningly mesmerising, with its faintly suggested pulses of rhythm and crystalline shards of sound.

The final cut comes from an August 2001 performance at The Knitting Factory. Hooker drummer, the two guitarists blasted forth, and Marclay proved himself to be the real 'joker in the pack', making his presence known at the outset with his transmuted records of classical chamber music in clever sampled and skipping layers. The moment the guitars and drums come in, the whole piece lifts off like a flying battleship; and you know immediately that this is the boldest and most powerful statement on the whole CD. High energy, 'effortless' guitar noise and topnotch jet-propulsion drumming make this an absolutely killer cut.

Text Of Light completely lives up to its name: a kaleidoscopic light-show of energy sounds, with enough density inscribed in the playing to make each of these performances into 'inexhaustible documents' of free improvisation. It's guaranteed to bring vast amounts of rewarding pleasure to all music fans. Buy-buy-buy!!!

ED PINSENT 01/11/2004
PO Box 424762, San Francisco, CA 94142-4762, USA
www.midheaven.com



Various Artists
Space is No Place: NYC Noise from the Underground Volume 2
USA PSYCH-O-PATH RECORDS
CDPSP-7 CD (2004)

A follow-up to last year's outstanding comp of NYC 'underground' noise; where its predecessor concentrated largely on freakish, wild and hairy loud avant-rock, *Volume 2* is quieter, more electronic, but no less weird. All exclusive and new contributions, all essential except perhaps one or two cuts. The emphasis leans more towards analogue electronica experimentation, and low-key free improvisation…but no matter what means are used, these musicians all seem to share a twisted, darkened view of modern urban life. Some pretty scary sound-pictures emerge. According to these views, NYC may be a lot of things, but boring it certainly ain't! Also noteworthy that a number of these combos are side-projects of extant New York bands which were already pretty marginal and obscure to start with…gives impression of fertile, lively, and promiscuous activity.

Aero and Anderegg play a drifting drone emanating from the bottom of a well, underpinned with minimal bass guitar rhythm, to create shimmering patterns falling against their dirty glass window. This is the sound of young people wondering to themselves about the strangeness of their own lives, a sub-theme running throughout the entire disc. How did we get this far? They ask themselves. 'From this more confusion comes,' is the only reply. Tuba Mirum is presumably a one-off performance by Arkady Freeman, blowing his tuba through studio effects. Spooky as heck, it's a ghostly call to arms and a John Carpenter soundtrack rolled into one. When the tomb of Tutankhamen was excavated, they found these ancient war trumpets and asked an army bugler to try them out. He sounded the charge. As a result, World War broke out. This track reminds me of that supernatural episode…

Spaceman plays pure electronics in a solo piece of heavy droning and pulsing analogue sounds, perhaps using moog wave-forms. It works brilliantly when he gets tired of being 'clever' and plays single notes in a basic 'dumbbell' pattern; that way, he develops a stone-killer approach to monotony. Not as dirty a sound as his title ('Insalubrity') implies, although it is a realistic picture of dark, dank dishwater in an abandoned apartment. Spaceman's is one of the best cuts on the comp…Beard-O are a Mouthus/Axolotl side project. Both bands have full-length releases on this label. Here, they form a trio that uses distortion and electronics to create a mutant Art-School minimal disco nightmare piece. Residents-styled percussion and evil-smelling grindey-drones are stapled together in this terrific, ramshackle, anti-rock song. Verbalala also play beats and mutant disco. Backed with malevolent synth moans, singer Abbey Noelle tonelessly adds an echoed chanted vocal that's a studied exercise in passionlessness. This is making me nostalgic for 1980, for some reason…

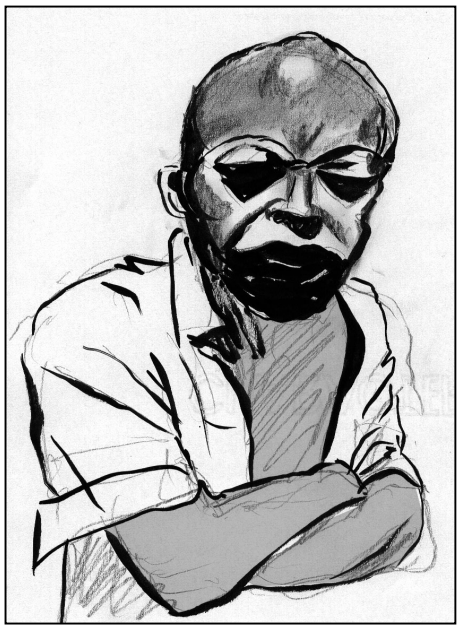
Chaw Mank are a guitar bass and drums trio. In a fantastic high-energy workout, they sock you over the head with a solid mahogany club of noise. Distorted howls, pounding snare drum beat, and overdriven FX pedals crying for mercy beneath their swollen feet. This monstrous trio of ogres is formed from members of Sightings and Mouthus. Sightings also lend members to the Cocaine project, a 5-piece where guitars and bass clash with electronics and warped singing voices. This glorpy minimal anti-rock statement is smothered with vile, slimy textures of repellent sounds, and harsh shards of low-fi deathly rattlings…this 'Overhell' of theirs is just great!

Squaw make a rich and sumptuous noise in 'Cave of the Sleeping Lizard'; a single steady and satisfying blast of feedback is mixed with alien electronic layers. Tan As Fuck are yet another trio who pour great globs of warped and inedible electronic soup into their witches' cauldron, causing fine squeals to escape from tortured circuits, scads of treated guitar attack and primitive drum-machine pulsing. Lucerne are a slight disappointment; a slightly odd and menacing tune are all this duo can manage, with some decorative electronic effects. The track by Chuck Bettis and Toshio Kajiwara is also a bit more ordinary (in this context at least), and I can't hear much direction or purpose in amongst all their churning activity. The only musicians here to use laptops and turntables with their electronics, they stand out as sounding quite modernistic amongst all the retro analogue-fiend, 'back to 1978' diehards on show here. Speaking of which, the CD ends with Jah Division, a talented trio who create convincing instrumental dub music with some futuristic touches. Augustus Pablo in a time machine.

Another strong compilation filled with music that speaks volumes about urban alienation, squalor, pollution, weirdness, stress, the

difficulty of communication, and just about all the things that make modern life worthwhile. Or even if you don't care about such things, still a grand collection of unusual and off-kilter music, urgent, vital and exciting. Highly recommended.

ED PINSENT 09/11/2004
www.psych-o-path.com



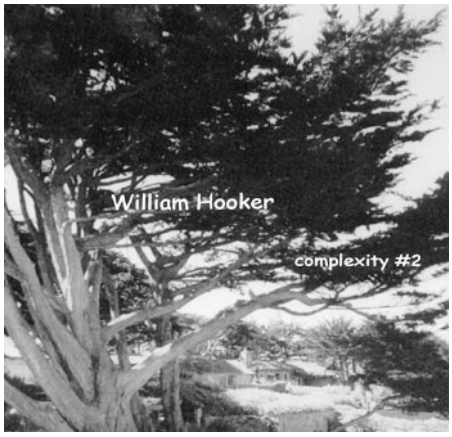
William Hooker
Complexity #2
USA KOS RECORDINGS KOS 011 CD (2004)

Astonishing musical workouts here from this hero of modern music. I always thought of Hooker as a good free-jazz revivalist hero, but this reveals he's also an accomplished composer, arranger, bandleader…and a drummer, of course…and his huge brainy noggin is packed with modernist compositional ideas that leave even Anthony Braxton lagging behind. All the cuts here were performed at the Knitting Factory in NYC in 2000. At least one of them comes close to a masterpiece of unexpected juxtapositions of sound art and enthused performances. It's called 'Twelve Windows'.

'Twelve Windows', much to my surprise every time I play it, begins not with music at all but an extended field recording taken from the seaside. Roaring of waves predominates, joined by friendly cries from gulls and nearby sea-monsters. Instruments are then progressively added to this 'core' sound, but in highly sympathetic ways that seem to align the musicians' sounds with nature itself. Doug Walker's synthesizer enters the arena crawling along like a sea-turtle; its wheezing and phasing sounds adding muchly to the atmosphere of the brine. The accumulating sounds develop into inspired duo between synth and drums of Hooker, creating a whirling and spinning effect of amazing, counter-clockwise vortices. Momentum gathers; D J Olive spins records of whale-songs (very much in keeping with maritime theme) and adds these to mix, then we hear the demonic violin-bowing of Eyvind Kang (who has notably fiddled in live setting with Sun City Girls). This ever-increasing astonishing piece is a lengthy 41-minute frolic of constant movement and energetic performative activity. And very advanced too; it's beyond free jazz, beyond electric Miles, incorporating samples and live electronics, and it sounds just incredible.

Two other cuts 'Emergence' and 'Roerich's Word' fill out the disc with similarly-mannered squealing episodes, with less of the composed aspects but with no less energy or commitment in the playing. Hooker's drumming is like thunderclaps…the players equipped with electronics are constantly freaking out in frenzied manner…Kang is superb, especially on the last track where he's giving out Hendrix-like effusions and emanations. In all there's a lot of tough-minded engagement between all the players, yet also space for some delightfully messy 'splurging' and painterly effects. CD is only slightly let down by its muffled recording quality, so presumably comes from a live tape, which wasn't of primo quality (if so it would have been on John Zorn's label years ago). Still, the energy pours off it nonetheless...very much worth lending your ears. Reminds one of the 'glory days' of the 1980s, when men were men and weren't afraid of risking their careers with exciting genre crossovers of this sort…

ED PINSENT 21/10/2004
Daron Key, 389 Palm Ave #19, Oakland CA 94610, USA
daron_k@yahoo.com



Steven Wray Lobdell
Live at Club Donut
USA HOLY MOUNTAIN 21203LP VINYL LP (2004)

Here's a killer of a live solo recording by American freak-guitarist Lobdell. One's always been somewhat in awe, not to say slightly terrified, by the uncanny studio recordings by this musician, a guy who is genuinely unhinged (he used to hear voices in his head). His studio work, including that for Faust, may be enhanced by overdubs, so how would he fare in a live solo context, one man, one amplifier, and lots of pedals?

Answer: ten times as scary. This performance only takes a few minutes of warming up before, WHOOSH! It lifts off and soars away into the stratosphere. He picks out a vaguely menacing Flamenco-style sketch to get going, then the phase and wah-wah pedals kick in and suddenly everything goes nuts. Brilliant explosions of controlled noise erupt, skilful guitar licks (hammering-on, sliding) produce locked-in-spastic mode events, causing cosmic mayhem. The amped-up loud volumes work in his favour…he controls the energy like a puppet-master, totally in control of the noise he's blasting forth.

The sense of chaos you hear, then, comes not from the music itself, but rather from Lobdell's inner chaos, his mental turmoil, translating almost directly into feral, twisted, tremendous guitar music. Once underway, the energy flow doesn't stop…he's just the hairy wild-eyed loon who keeps on giving! Soon, he's got two riffs going in tandem together – one riff speaks to the other, one riff answers back, much like the voices inside his brain carrying on a dialogue. Sheer, manic energy pours out of him like greased-up ectoplasm. The B-side hears him picking out distorted melodies against the accompaniment of a strong low-end amplifier hum, while the delay pedal sets up mocking ghosts of each of his phrases. An alien-drenched atmosphere emanates from his presence, and floats off the vinyl into your ears.

Recorded live in a tiny donut shop in Portland Oregon (so small it's actually situated in a loft above the toilet), this record comes highly recommended as an excessive, mighty cosmic guitar workout, might almost be the sound of a man jamming with his own split personality. Astonishing. Pressed in limited quantities; if you missed this, urge Holy Mountain to reissue it on CD immediately.

ED PINSENT 29/10/2004
PO Box 420511, San Francisco, CA 94142, USA
www.holymountain.com

Black Forest / Black Sea
Forcefields and Constellations
USA BLUESANCT INRI076 CD (2004)

This is just the second album for this duo and already I see this twosome from Providence, Rhode Island, heading for great things with their graceful yet bewitching brand of folk improv. Listening to this CD, even after several spins already, is always a strange experience as BF / BS must have intended: it's often very beautiful, gentle and soothing but also very unsettling and full of deep silent mystery. Ah, of course, the name Miriam Goldberg and Jeffrey Alexander chose for their act must have something to do with this contradiction: the stillness of the forest, promising deep secrets whispered only by the trees, joined together with the moody restless sea with its unfathomable depths and hidden treasures.

I prefer the freaky / freaked-out tracks, as TSP reviewers are wont to do: 'Hung Far Lowish' comes over like Godspeed You Black Emperor's electric guitar / violins section zonking out on uppers and downers. 'Kyy Plays Perpetual Change', featuring a sample from those Finnish psychedelic folksters Kemialliset Ystavat, is a parade of wraiths twanging away on equally skeletal and ghost-like instruments in the dead of night. The wonderfully named '...with a dead man I've never met' (this track comes after one called 'I'm in love...') is sure to induce queasiness with its seesawing rhythms, slightly desperate acoustic guitar and passages of heaving noise and electric guitar howls. 'F vs. BF/BS', with a sample from US act Fursaxa, is a rough-hewn drone adorned with subtle eerie effects tunnelling through briers of bell-like sounds and strange noises. The very space is thick with invisibility making it hard for the drone to burrow through. 'Jamestown' is not merely unsettling - with violins and cellos sailing off at odd tangents into uncharted territories of sound, it's quite deranged. On many tracks, the electric guitar workout is something to behold and yet the music can still be called folk; the guitar playing techniques may be familiar to the point of being trite but the results are fresh and quite unexpected. Considering that a number of pieces were either recorded live or at home, I find the production quality of this CD quite an achievement.

Not so scary but still good pieces include 'Nylon 2' (track 2) which is waterfall acoustic guitar over a background of eerie tones; 'Fish No Fish', sounding intimate and superficially mainstream with soft vocals until you notice the deliberately out-of-tune guitar notes which enhance the song's charm; and 'Nylon 1' (track 10!), another lovely if very brief acoustic guitar piece. Some tracks are very short and seem unfinished, others barely hang together, but I take this to be part of the game plan. Overall, this is a very beguiling recording which reveals a little (but only a little! - that's also part of the game plan) of what secrets are hidden within Black Forest / Black Sea. A very subtle and mischievous humour - just look at some of the track titles! - enhances the music's charm.

JENNIFER HOR
www.blackforestblacksea.com
Bluesanct, PO Box 2192, Bloomington, IN, 47402, USA
www.bluesanct.com

Black Forest / Black Sea
Radiant Symmetry
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 065 CD (2004)

The follow-up to *Forcefields and Constellations* is on the whole quite an agreeable if at times mournful recording but it's not as strong or distinctive as its predecessor. Parts of this album, made up of live recordings from BF / BS's European jaunt in early 2004, sound much like a wistful and nostalgic Godspeed You Black Emperor without that band's beefy percussion backing; two tracks recorded in Finland, featuring musicians from that country's psychedelic folk improv scene, can't help but sound a bit like Kiila (at this time of writing, I had not heard anything by Kemialliset Ystavat and their other colleagues so I can't say whether those bands might also have had an influence) and track 1 is a messy stumbling piece reminiscent of No-Neck Blues Band.

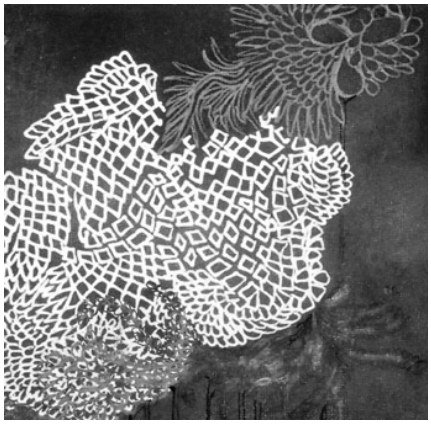
It's only on a few tracks recorded in Italy and England that BF / BS start sounding anything like their usual mysterious and slightly deranged selves. The tracks recorded in England have a definite mood that's pretty much melancholy (too much so on track 9, which just drags on and on) and nostalgic, and feature some harsh guitar feedback. Perhaps the English spring weather was an inspiration. Tracks 4 and 7, recorded in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, I consider the highlights: track 4 juxtaposes noisy guitar, mourning cello and resonant chiming echoes; track 7 is a quirky piece with eerie bewitching omnichord tones seesawing over a befuddled guitar. Disappointing then that the rest of the album is not as strikingly idiosyncratic as these two pieces though the music is quite good.

Recommended for those days when the rain is falling steadily outside and shows every sign of continuing for the next week or so, and all you can do is mope and wish summer or winter for that matter would hurry up.

JENNIFER HOR
PO Box 2631, Providence, RI 02906, USA
www.lvd.4mg.com

Axolotl
Axolotl
USA PSYCH-O-PATH RECORDS CDPSP-8 CD (2004)

Great record of acoustic improv and electronica madness here from this new-ish American collective, led by Karl Bauer, with drummer William Sabiston and guitarist Brian Tester. They're based in San Francisco and Bauer came to this collective from his collaborations with Sightings, Mouthus, Black Dice, and Double Leopards. All three of them play electronics here, although overall the record has a lot of droney violin courtesy of Bauer. It's a great mix of acoustic weirdness with electronic weirdness. Use of the latter is first inspiring feature, very noticeable on first track which is a mesmerising electric pulsewave, half-Mego electronics and half-



drone. Quite a refreshing use of electronic sounds, very direct, simple and somehow obvious…you wish more digital CDs were made this way, but Axolotl have no interest in competing in that area, despite the Mego comparisons thrown their way. Their use of electronic sounds is to assist the listener to enter trance state, in quite primitive and simple way.

We continue to move through fussy electronics backed by drones that sound like whale songs into other musical territory partaking of found sounds of an industrial nature, more drones and a rusty ambience. Second inspiring element is 'naturalistic' approach of these fellows to improvising; they manage to make it seem completely uncontrived. The gentle wittering of this second track, with its beguiling violin and clattering percussion, should impress you with evidence of this. Not at all aggressive, but quietly confident. Third track is good example of extended improv which demonstrates why comparisons with The Taj Mahal Travellers are constantly springing to lips of critics. It comprises non-specific fields of grinding activity. Aimless and inspired meanderings in the musical woods. Divinely spontaneous acts of creativity.

Third inspiring feature: sense of the 'exotic' which, even with this debut release, seems to cling to Axolotl already. It may be no more than a fleeting impression and something they take to their collective psyche like an old tie-dyed T-shirt. Besides publicity notes alluding to mysteries of Japan and the 1970s, aura of hungover psychedelia and endless noodling jams is also discernible. This should not detract from the palpable 'otherness' and 'outness' of the music. Sleeve art however makes no effort to deny this impression. Back cover of CD could almost be a 1963 Sun Ra scrawl, cosmic spirals in blue on a red space field. Elaborate woven shapes on front cover put one in mind of an undiscovered ESP-Disc release from 1972.

Fourthly: Axolotl manage for most part to work their way into some seriously 'different' sounds, by accident or otherwise; never too loud or assertive, but can convincingly stake claim to join ranks of other holy freaks in this lineage, as camp followers. We're on track four and still not a regular rhythm in sight. A superficially Eastern-sounding violin drone accompanied by floating sighs, tablas, jingles and deep murmurs; sort of like Vibracathedral

Orchestra meets Taj Mahal Travelers in an electro-industrial setting. Manages to reach condition of quite delicious grinding and monotony that escapes being 'just another drone work'. Their music is far more feral, full of activity, chinking and chanking and mad energetic dancing. No settling into a rut of clumping march-beat rhythm, like the No-Necks. That said, 7th and last (and longest) track is a rather more ordinary electronic drone affair, probably played on keyboards. Characterised by long, slow, New Agey tones and drones, this track could well attract the label of 'filler' simply by its position on CD. I'm sure Bauer (Karl that is) and Sabiston could have done more with this piece. It just has no individuality compared with the rest of the album and could easily have come from, say, something by Keith Fullerton Whitman in a very mellow mood or most CDs on the Touch label roster.

Track before this features some mad gypsy fiddling nonsense, folksy violin loops with a scratchy rhythm, very wacked-out and irritating, with a near-autistic devotion to playing the same notes in such ways as to induce epileptic fits. 5th track before this invites John Cale / Tony Conrad comparisons, intense trance-work with plenty of sawing violins. I find this record occupying a position between the abrasive electronics of Wolf Eyes and the poppier approach of Black Dice with a strong identity borne of disparate influences. Bauer and Sabiston have a lot of potential to go in whatever direction they wish. Will observe next release with interest.

RROSE SELAVY
www.psych-o-path.com

Cerberus Shoal
Cerberus Shoal
USA NORTH EAST INDIE NEI 35
CD (2004)

This is a CD reissue of the first 1995 LP by this Boston-based band, who first came our way with the impressive *Chaiming the Knoblessone* CD and three intriguing collaborative split collections (of which there have been at least two more since), reviewed last issue. It's certainly interesting to listen to this 1995 LP and I do like it, but it's not as full-on weird as those later works. A basic guitar band with singing – or more precisely, muttered voices burbling incessantly low in the mix – Cerberus Shoal in 1995 seemed with their lean, sharp and precise playing to be building on an SST/Homestead guitar band model. In fact, namechecked influences are bands Still Life, Iconoclast, Downcast, Heriin, Merel, Hoover, Neurosis, Slint and Rodan – none of whom have graced my ears with their music, but sound like they could be real downers!

The Shoal rein themselves in constantly – no punk angst or heavy metal excess for these guys. In fact, when crescendos of intensity are brought in, it's a bit confusing as there's nothing audible in the lyrical content to let you know why the song should suddenly pick up tempo. This is due to singers Chris Sutherland and Caleb Mulkerin vaguely murmuring and ranting lyrics instead of declaiming or singing clearly, though all of this would develop by later records...and impression is formed of some strong poetical content among the half-formed vowel sounds that you can pick up.

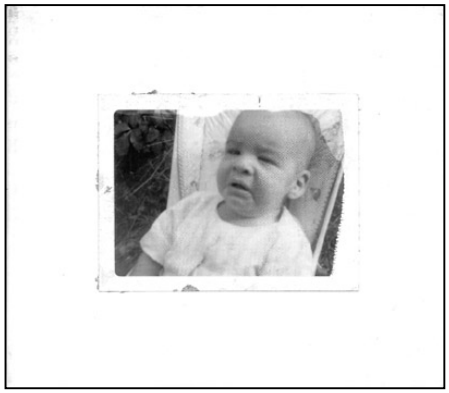
If you can't find this content in the words, seek it in the Rembrandt etching juxtaposed with sailing ship engraving on cover art. No doubt referring both to their mysterious artistic aspirations and their sea-faring environs in lovely picturesque town of Boston. Not that this lot were grateful to be living there in 1995 – sleeve notes refer to home town as 'harsh' and 'bleak'; maybe they were going through a rough patch, working out personal problems, and letting the dampness of the sea air seep into their gloomy veins.

A fine record in any case, with track 4 'Change' being the most successful musically with added violin from guest player Anju Rozario interplaying well with long guitar sighing-sounds to create overall mournful and crying effect, while vocalists continue to burble...tension, insistent strumming, dark and mysterious chord changes are the hallmarks of Cerberus Shoal, and though overall sound of this release may be a bit samey if you play it top to bottom, no denying this is sullen indie rock laced with intelligence and rendered with unique, rugged capability.

ED PINSENT 18/09/2004
www.northeastindie.com
www.cerberusshoal.com

Climax Golden Twins
Highly Bred and Sweetly Tempered
USA NORTH EAST INDIE NE134
CD (2004)

This is an excellent record and quite possibly their best one yet. The Twins have landed a new record deal with North East Indie, also home to rock eccentrics Cerberus Shoal (with whom they have toured). With this move, CGT have also moved on artistically; leaving behind their radical experimental stage (including the hand-printed editions of their works), and becoming much more focussed



and convincing. As a result, this CD is a strong, unique and beautifully crafted statement of Americana, and their work now seems set to appeal to a wider audience.

The same preoccupations and obsessions have followed them throughout – the use of old records in particular – now making a more pointed statement about an America that has completely vanished. The same nostalgic lament is to be heard in the melancholy music. The opener 'Dead People' is a gorgeous slow guitar instrumental, augmented with all manner of additional overdubs of banjo, piano, recorders, slide guitars. This studio construct builds into a miniature 'mandala' form, much like a kind of Pacific US version of Popol Vuh. The CD is a good mix of instrumentals (and one song), and collages using old recordings to evoke meanings. It's a CD of guitar picking, ambient mystery drones, and voices from the past. It's a dream of the phonograph, and its place in American history; wedded to a strong understanding of American folk blues, in the respective guitar styles of the duo.

This theme of 'visitations into the past' is demonstrated with use of old family recordings – oddities rescued from 'record your own voice' machines, or oral history recordings. Along with the photos of unknown babies on the cover, retrieved from forgotten family albums, everything is presented in a warm but wistful and nostalgic context. What's interesting is the things in history worth remembering are, according to CGT, family and friends – not wars, political struggles, or ideological clashes, but love. In 'Little Noreen', a proud father extemporises a rhymed greeting around the names of his children. 'Every Word in the Bible' is an intriguing sound collage, using the sounds of rainfall, perhaps an early 'ethnic' recording of Asian music, and another family reminiscence; the music enters with a deep sighing sound, fully in sympathy with the ambiguous array of emotions, and supporting the meaning of the spoken texts. Magical stuff.

Rob Millis (see his field recordings solo CD this issue) and Jeff Taylor were interviewed in issue 11 of *Sound Projector*. Below, some more words of wisdom from Rob regarding this release...It's good to see them moving on and gaining more support and interest.

ED PINSENT 31/10/2004
www.northeastindie.com
www.climaxgoldentwins.com

ROB MILLIS MINI-INTERVIEW

Really the record grew out of Jeffery and my interest in Americana (dreadful term), specifically old scratchy blues and folk. Also out of our 'work' with Dave Knott and Rick Bishop in our little Messenger Girls Trio outfit—playing and improvising with acoustic instruments. We started working on some sounds and songs at Scott Colburn's Gravelvoice studio. One day, I picked up a random book and opened to a random phrase declaring this would be the title of the record--the phrase I pointed to was 'Pick Out Your Ancestors', which seemed to suddenly gell in my enfeebled brain many threads and tangents that I had been thinking about: the roots of music in which we were interested as well as family roots and with our expanded information age TV addled culture the thought that you could, in a way, create one's own history or mythology…we recorded a few songs with Scott, and then finished the record at my home studio—writing and recording a few more songs, adding the old home-recorded 78 samples and stories and bringing everything together.

Once the 78rpm fetish set in for me and Jeffery and we began scouring junk shops for old records, we began finding many of these 'home recorded' records (the technology developed in the 1930s and 40s I guess). Most were junk--copies of other records, recordings off the radio, failed home recordings. Also the quality was terrible--for some reason the process used was not stable and the records were really decaying fast. They have a particular musty smell. (Ever sniffed a record?) But some were gems, just like old photographs, that seemed (to me) to capture the spirit of the subjects or a moment in time. A relationship. A history in a few unspoken words. Awkward pauses. People recording themselves getting drunker and drunker at a party, the anticipation of hearing one's own voice, letters home from wartime, conversations, baby's first words, songs to a sweetheart...we had to pick and choose, easily we have more than a CDs worth of just heart wrenching recordings like these.

The scratchy hazy quality of these records, the voices from the past, the wear and tear of time (literally revealed on the surfaces of these objects...) very much appealed as a texture and as a physical or auditorial (is that a word?) embodiment of history and the strange spaces between people...static communication...

But being Climax Golden Twins, we don't address ideas like these directly, rather like we don't (can't…?) do an accurate cover of one of those old songs we love. All these thoughts and influences got forced through the Climax food processor and out came *Highly Bred and Sweetly Tempered*, which seemed a better name than *Pick out Your Ancestors*…

Gerald Hawk
The Honey Guide Bird
USA ABDUCTION ABDT026 CD
[2004]

Heavy, spooky, black magic stuff. When I first heard it I thought this was a total nightmare, but have since learned to embrace its macabre qualities. This is the follow-up to his previous solo disc *King Of The River Canoe*, which I was mightily impressed by, also on the Abduction label. One might be tempted to suspect a Sun City Girls alias here (like the elusive Alvarius B, for example), but it seems Hawk is a genuine weirdie based in California and may be a film-maker (unless I'm falling into a misinformation trap). At any rate, his musical works are weirdies even if he isn't himself!

The cinematic sensibility (if true) comes to bear on much of his musical output. *Honey Guide Bird* suggests a kind of continuity of the horrifying personae and milieux already sketched out on previous CD: shadowy characters, these. A demented hillbilly, backwoods psychopaths, a loner in his remote shack in the swamp…Hawk creates mini-movies in sound and song, only they are very ambiguous with no attempt at a linear story. Instead, only glimpses and snatches of information are given, suggestive of many horrifying things. Primitive witchcraft at work, depraved unnatural sex acts, a recluse talking to himself, madness and cabin fever slowly setting in…the eight tracks come equipped with surreal and baffling titles, with no information that can adequately prepare you for what you hear. Each track is further fragmented into mini-narratives, false starts and sudden endings, episodes of fractured logic. Highly disorienting.

Not a single lyric or recit floats by on this record without it being treated through excessive amounts of studio distortion – filters, modulators, muffles, shredders – until barely a single word is recognisable. Heck, a lot of the time it's not even recognisable as human speech! The voice of the singer/narrator is transformed into a monster. Or several kinds of monsters. Musical accompaniment for these utterances comprises some strummed acoustic guitar, played in deliberately untutored, spastic way. Vocals are half sung, half muttered. This technique alone constitutes a radical and experimental reinvention of the singer-songwriter genre, simultaneously parodying that stale old form and pushing it, unwillingly, into an extreme form of performance art.

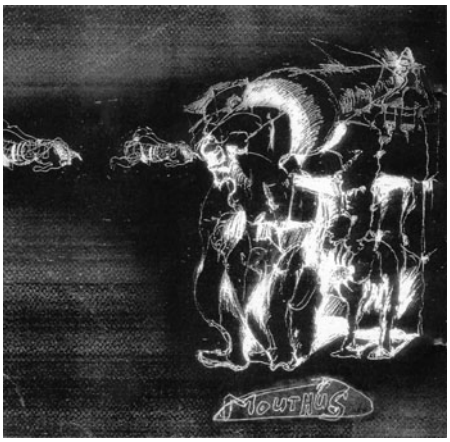
But there's also electronic backing sounds – atmospheric noises, minimal drones, crude and effective bursts of abstraction, all adding further cinematic depths (suspense, tension) and dark perspectives to Hawk's warped vision. With these anti-Ambient backdrops, he's taking a picture that's pretty deranged to begin with, and mangling it further out of recognition. He may have pushed this thing about as far as it can go. This is almost as challenging as genuine 'Outsider Art'; a unique listening experience, and an uncomfortable one. Part electro-acoustic, part songs, all weird!

ED PINSENT 10/11/2004
Abduction Records, PO Box 9611 Seattle, WA 98109 USA
www.geraldhawk.com

Jeff Fuccillo
Disturbed Strings
USA ROARATORIO ROAR 07
VINYL LP (2004)

Here's an interesting guitar LP from 1998, whose principal point of interest is that it was produced by John Fahey. The story of it is a good one…Fuccillo is a young, fresh-faced and talented guitar player who winds up as the support act for John Fahey at a gig in Portland. Fahey sits stony-faced in the audience, and intimidates the youngster with his glaring, baleful presence. Fuccillo is worried sick about the impression he's making on the 'guitar legend' Fahey. Next day, Fahey approaches Jeff offers to help him make a record. Life's full of surprises.

Once in the studio, Fuccillo starts strumming on his acoustic git to lay down the tracks for what he naively assumes will be 'his' studio LP. Next thing you know he's hearing weird sounds bombarding him, invading the studio through the monitors. Fahey has brought in



lots of prepared samples and found tapes, and he's playing them on the mixing desk, bringing them into the equation 'live', just to throw the youngster off-balance. Such mischief. Will he sink or swim? Hear this LP and find out…

Leave us not forget John Fahey's remarkable 1968 release, *Requia*, in which his guitar elegies were accompanied with strong and exciting tape-montage works. I gather that at the time, and long afterwards, critics and fans hated it…the received wisdom was that Fahey should stick to guitar instrumentals and not try to 'improve' them with tape interpolations. Edwin Pouncey is one writer to have recognised Fahey for what he is – a species of electro-acoustic composer who happened to work primarily with the acoustic guitar. Now's your chance with this LP to fill in the gaps for those final years of this true maverick, and hear one of his final creative gasps (he died in 2001). To be honest, it's not quite the 'explosive' combination that the sleeve note makes out; a 'guerrilla collaboration' it ain't, but it's always fascinating to listen to and sometimes the sparks fly.

Fuccillo has played with Irving Klaw Trio, Wham-O and Hochenkeit. Jack Rose he may not be, but he has a good 'scrabbly' method of applying his strumming hand to the strings that betokens as much interest in Derek Bailey as in Mississippi John Hurt. In fact his playing style seems to have a little bit of everything, from improvised atonal runs, to modal drones in a folk idiom, to note-bending slide excursions. It's also interesting to near how his reactions to the foreign samples (when they appear) are almost always instantaneous. His musical 'response' is immediate; has to be said, it's also rather obvious. The two-hour recording session was continuous, and edited into pieces for ease of listening. Fahey hated the finished product; it was 'too nice', he snarled gruffly into his grizzled beard. Too bad, Mr Fahey; they went ahead and released it anyway. Includes a reproduction of a Fahey decalcomania artwork on the back. A nifty item.

ED PINSENT 30/10/2004
PO Box 300574, Minneapolis, MN 55403, USA
www.roaratorio.com

Mouthus
Mouthus
USA PSYCH-O-PATH RECORDS PSP6 CD (2004)

Terrific, primal and feral underground rock noise from these relative unknowns…hard to believe they're only a duo, considering the racket they make! Brian Sullivan and Nate Nelson of Brooklyn use drums and amplification to deliver 7 episodes of snarling, aggressive filth. I'm fooled into thinking I hear some cheap electronics in here, unless it's a crude and crappy guitar that's been detuned, fucked-up and over-amplified. The whole LP creates the aural illusion of some ghastly electronic resonator lurking in back of the mix, adding vile and simplistic comments as the crew hammer out their drunken madness. So basic is this *Mouthus* that even the vilest punk rock LP sounds like prog rock next to it.

Opening with a belting drum and percussion blast that knocks the listener senseless, 'Sand On Sand' features some horrible electronic sound spitting poison while crazed feedback issues forth inane whoops. 'Am Here Slowly' is an intense bout of tribal drumming with non-stop monotonous soloing, evil bass grind and caveman-styled chanting…the duo wallow in heavy electronic concrete-sludge for this update on head-banger music. Dark and powerful modernist naïve rock blastage it be, vomited out by evil assassins. 'Christian Finger' is a short fragment sounding like mad unknown Pebbles garage band, suddenly let loose in a gigantic rock stadium…further frenetic and tuneless guitar riffing on these 90 seconds of masturbatory energy!

'China Drier' uses heavy explosions and noisy percussive blattering. It's growing harder to separate out the instruments in the shapeless, messy free-for-all of writhing energy that's going down in the studio here. All their music has a constipated, grunged-up indigestible knot of fury at its core, an impotent volcano building up steam…'Head of Shifting I' is a chugging, trundling piece of gibberish, created by magical means unknown to man. It's an obsessive, grey, muttering din of incommunicative spew, I'm happy to report. 'Head of Shifting II' features more of the same spew, except additional drumbeats are thrown in, like a pack of bacon thrown in to placate starving rats in the dungeon. These mid-point tracks seem to be the 'mellow' portion of the set, if you can call it that. *Mouthus* is sounding more and more like a document rescued from the sick minds of brain-damaged genius-morons, fit for inflicting additional brain damage on the rest of the world. Easily on a par with the original Amon Düül, which is my usual benchmark for wild untutored primitivism in rock.

The final cut is 'Great to Spot the Sea', which brings us back to the raging guitar and drummery freak-out mayhem, a track whose choppy rhythm guitar suggests said sea is in extremely stormy and dangerous mode…this rollicking romp features 'vocals' of a sort, but in keeping with general aesthetic of this LP they are mumbled, moaned and mauled by tobacco-damaged throat of singer, as he aims for maximum distortion by swallowing as much of mic as possible. A fitting claustrophobic nightmare to close this diseased, black, filthy record. A complete joy for lovers of vicious, scuzzy, doom-rock delivered with delicious 'arty' touches. One of the best things I heard all year!

ED PINSENT 20/11/2004
www.psych-o-path.com

Sapat / The SB
Seed and Surgery
USA FREE 103 POINT 9 AUDIO DISPATCH NUMBER 15 CD-R (2003)

A split CD-R low-run release on that kooky, oddball label that's the imprint of radio show in NYC, Free 103.9, home to many an experimental and marginal music. Two live tracks, one by Sapat, one by The SB, recorded in the radio station's gallery venue September 2003. Sapat are a free noise performance combo from Louisville, Kentucky. They possess a strangely beguiling moaning brand of noise, generated on keyboards, sax, electronics, vocals, guitars, percussion…it meanders around like 20 maddened pythons in a basket. There's so much love of music here, the very forward-movement of it propelled by love of doing it…and a strong feeling for free jazz, you can hear quite a few Sun Ra / BYG aficionados in here. Roy Campbell Jr is a featured player here. What they play keeps mutating, apparently effortlessly, as part of the natural energy flow. Different moods, tempos, changing dynamics, all held within a loose structure. You can't get loose without that juice. The SB is a music collective from NYC. Their cut is a huge droning chorus, a mighty, fogged-up, multi-sounding entity suggestive of the Staten Island Ferry. They claim an experimental approach to 'audio intermodulation and sympathetic resonance'. The moog playing here is especially noteworthy. All similarly diffuse and loose-boned…The sleeve art shows a 'Family of Man' image, perhaps a tad clichéd, perhaps taken from a discarded religious tract, but this picture does state something about the genuine warmth, compassing, and bonding energy that's in all the music here. A good pair of free-wheeling, 'natural'-sounding jams.

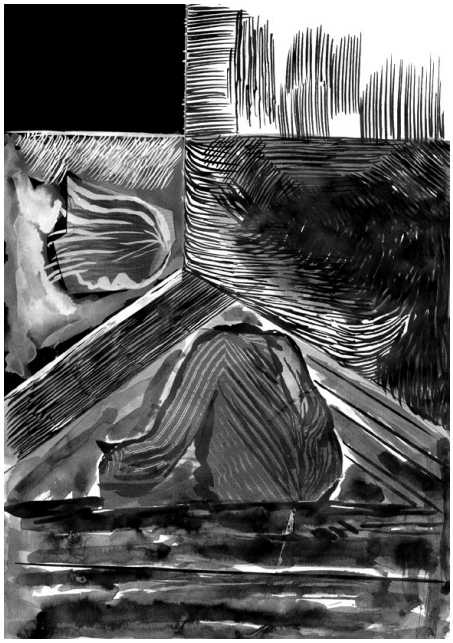
ED PINSENT 29/10/2004
www.free103point9.org

✦BLOCK!!EURS✦

The New Blockaders
FaLtEn
UNITED KINGDOM HYPNAGOGIA NAG01 10" VINYL LP (2003)

A new TNB record – surely an occasion for rejoicing, or at the very least replenishing the tub of cotton buds in the bathroom to nurse your sore ears…I've said it before, but for a band so devoted to the pursuit of 'Nothing', TNB tend to release quite a lot of 'Something'. This one and the live LP are new items, and there's also slabs of reissued vinyl available from Germany. This particular 10-incher, pressed in clear vinyl and limited to 400 copies, seems to be a Paul Anomali creation whereon he casts out an exciting 'mix' out of sound sources supplied by Richard Rupenus. Yes, much the same as Merzbow has done this year – see elsewhere in issue – but where the hand of Masami Akita turns that ugly duckling into a swan, the Anomali mix takes great pains to remind you of how ugly the duckling was to begin with. Keeping in spirit with many New Blockaders releases I have heard, *FaLtEn* remains dogged in its pursuit of determinedly 'difficult' noise, sounds whose hard-to-negotiate crunchiness keeps the adept listener on toes at all times whilst dodging the anti-personnel mines concealed in the terrain underfoot.

However, compared to the familiar 'continuous barrage' of TNB noise hat I recall with such fond memory from about this time last year (when I memorably listened to the entire TNB four CD retrospective set in a single grey afternoon in November), *FaLtEn* displays rather more – erm - progressive tendencies in the use of edits, drop-outs, dynamics, phasing (briefly), and its overall efforts to re-energise the sound in many ways. This short and sweet tumult of noise could almost be termed a 'dub mix' of Rupenus original waxes, utilising minimal processing effects, yet still leaving raw and bleeding chasmic wounds in the body of the patient. That patient could be Richard Rupenus himself, or it could be you or I…those wounds are vicious gashes, hacked into the body of mainstream bourgeois culture and everything decent that it stands for. A laudable gesture – and a fine record. As the world knows, 'falten' means 'folding' or 'creases' in the German tongue, but in English it also suggests a pun somewhere in between 'faults', 'falling' and 'faltering'. Given the relentless pace of this music, it does anything but falter. But it does depict a major 'fall' to rank with the collapse of the Tower Struck by Lightning, ie Tarot Arcana Major No XVI.



ED PINSENT 03/11/2004
www.thenewblockaders.org.uk
www.hypnagogia.org.uk

The New Blockaders
Changez Les Blockeurs: 21st Antiversary Edition
GERMANY VINYL-ON-DEMAND VOD 6 VINYL LP (2004)

Just to let you know this exists…(again)…it's a repress of the very first 1982 LP and may even have original sleeve art reproduced on cover. It's the drawing with a grid of early 'classical' woodcuts, defaced with doodles in scrawls in Indian ink, which may provide a visual clue as to what the TNB outlook on life was going to be, right from the start. If still not clued in, read the manifesto printed on the back cover. If you missed the 4-CD retrospective set, then you might have another shot at hearing this one at least, but unfortunately I think it's (a) already sold out and (b) was only available as part of a set with three other records, all with the same catalogue number (hence the example below, also numbered VOD 6). Actual musical contents of this were reviewed last issue, if interested. It's about their most 'difficult' LP.

ED PINSENT 03/11/2004
www.vinyl-on-demand.com

The New Blockaders
First Live Performance: Morden Tower, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 8th June 1983
GERMANY VINYL-ON-DEMAND VOD 6 VINYL LP (2004)

This also exists. The two live cuts seem to be from June 1983, ie one month before the earliest live documents issued on the four CD set. Everything live from this period – one year after their debut LP – was performed at The Morden Tower in Newcastle, presumably the only place on earth that would have them. The back cover features a photograph of a memorial plaque for this venue, but strangely enough the historic noise-events of TNB are not yet commemorated on it. Front cover has a photo of a New Blockader with his head in bandages. Confess I haven't played this yet; I wonder what treats are in store for me?

ED PINSENT 03/11/2004
www.vinyl-on-demand.com

The New Blockaders
Live at Hinoeuma London (2003)
USA RRRECORDS RRR TNB VINYL PICTURE DISC (2004)

A solid and sumptuous picture disc on Ron Lessard's RRR imprint contains a 'document' of their London 2003 live event…presumably this was the 'final' appearance of the band at the Red Rose club. A slightly less than 'all-out assault' exemplar of TNB's work, this one has a vaguely gentler surface than usual, and yet its soothing hoover-noise and metallic bric-a-brac conceals depths of evil, mind-shattering intent. The harshness, in other words, has simply been wrapped in cotton wool. Loops, electronics, swishing and banging methods are all used. The understated power gathers and grows, without any urgency, as the efficient team of demolition men go about their job. The familiar TNB 'inertness' factor is much in evidence; there is no sense of forward motion or dynamic, and instead one is trapped in a stagnant bath full of foul, cloudy, excrescence…oil, detergent, sewage and the like, with rusty junkyard debris swimming about. This may have been produced with the assistance of underground hero Phil Todd, plus Paul Anomali; Mr Harbinger is also thanked…the usual green and brown collages form the picture on this disc, limited to 400 copies.

ED PINSENT 20/11/2004
www.rrrecords.com
www.thenewblockaders.org.uk

✦ ✦ ✦

See also MERZBOW section

The Vitamin B12

20 questions from the Sound Projector
Conducted by email in October 2004

EP = Ed Pinsent
AW = Alasdair Willis

EP The Vitamin B12 – is it a collective, or a solo act, or a duo? Or all of the above?

AW Back in 1986 it was just used as a label for identifying the cassette tapes we were recording. We started out by wrapping them with the labels from Peacocks Italian peeled tomatoes, but then Peacocks changed their label design so I just typed The Vitamin B12 on the spine of the insert which happened to be the name we had performed under that week. None of us thought the name 'The Vitamin B12' gave us a group or collective identity, we were a bunch of extremely individual characters with our own agendas and interests. As we went our various directions I continued labelling the tapes with The Vitamin B12 even when it was just me on the recordings.

EP You've released a lot of Vitamin B12 items this year and last year, Can you remind our readers of what they were…and perhaps add those released by other friendly labels as subsidiary list.

Laleh Ladan gatefold set – a double LP with 18 cards self-released on the Little Gems label
Badges – a double LP self-released on the Suzy label
A date at the Rendezvous with the Jim Mcalister Quartet – a single LP self-released on the Tiptop label
Candy – a triple LP self-released on the Windows label
Cutey's Carpet – a single LP self-released on the Warburton Doodles label

2 ten inch gatefold set – a double 10" released on the Italian Elica label
Other Worlds – a single LP released on the Italian Qbico label

EP Can you say which of these recent releases is your personal favourite, and why.

AW They all contain moments and ideas very personal to me, but personally speaking *Laleh Ladan* stands out as the most mentally traumatic, ecstatic and bewildering, whilst *Badges* contains the strongest emotional ties with the past

such as the voice of my dead mother and the childhood passport photos of my dear lost friend Suzanne.

EP I notice you plump for vinyl releases only. Good choice. But why? Got anything against compact discs?

AW The thought of sound being made into an object is kind of bizarre but the simple mechanics of a record, reversing the process of cutting the groove so as to play it, is such a delight compared with the digital encoding method of the compact disc.

At a push a record can be played with just a cone of paper and a pin. CDs don't yield the information they contain so willingly.

I'm not against compact discs, I'm just used to thinking in terms of albums and singles, I grew up with them, piles of old singles and 78s that were discarded by my father and older siblings.

I guess my records make connections with my experiences of playing other records just by being records, much as a painting will refer to other paintings merely by fulfilling the criteria of being a painting.

The rituals surrounding the playing of records are fascinating, revealing how willingly we conform to rules and cultural conventions. Even when we flout these rules we are acknowledging their presence.

EP When it comes to providing credits or contextual information on sleeves, your watchword seems to be 'anonymity' at all costs. Would you agree? Any reason for this strategy?

AW There is more information on the sleeves in terms of the content and process of their design. But I hope these certain concepts and allusions don't needlessly intrude on other possible ways someone may wish to investigate the albums. These albums are partly my own personal adventures into the endless aspects of listening.

Record covers do effect the way I listen and they take on an album's physical identity. Sound and vision greatly effect each other, shaping and illuminating one another.

It could be thought slightly perverse to use a commercial medium for non-commercial purposes. I guess it can confuse people who are expecting to find something more familiar in this format. A seeming lack of information can appear mystifying rather than liberating, but further investigation will I hope reap much greater rewards.

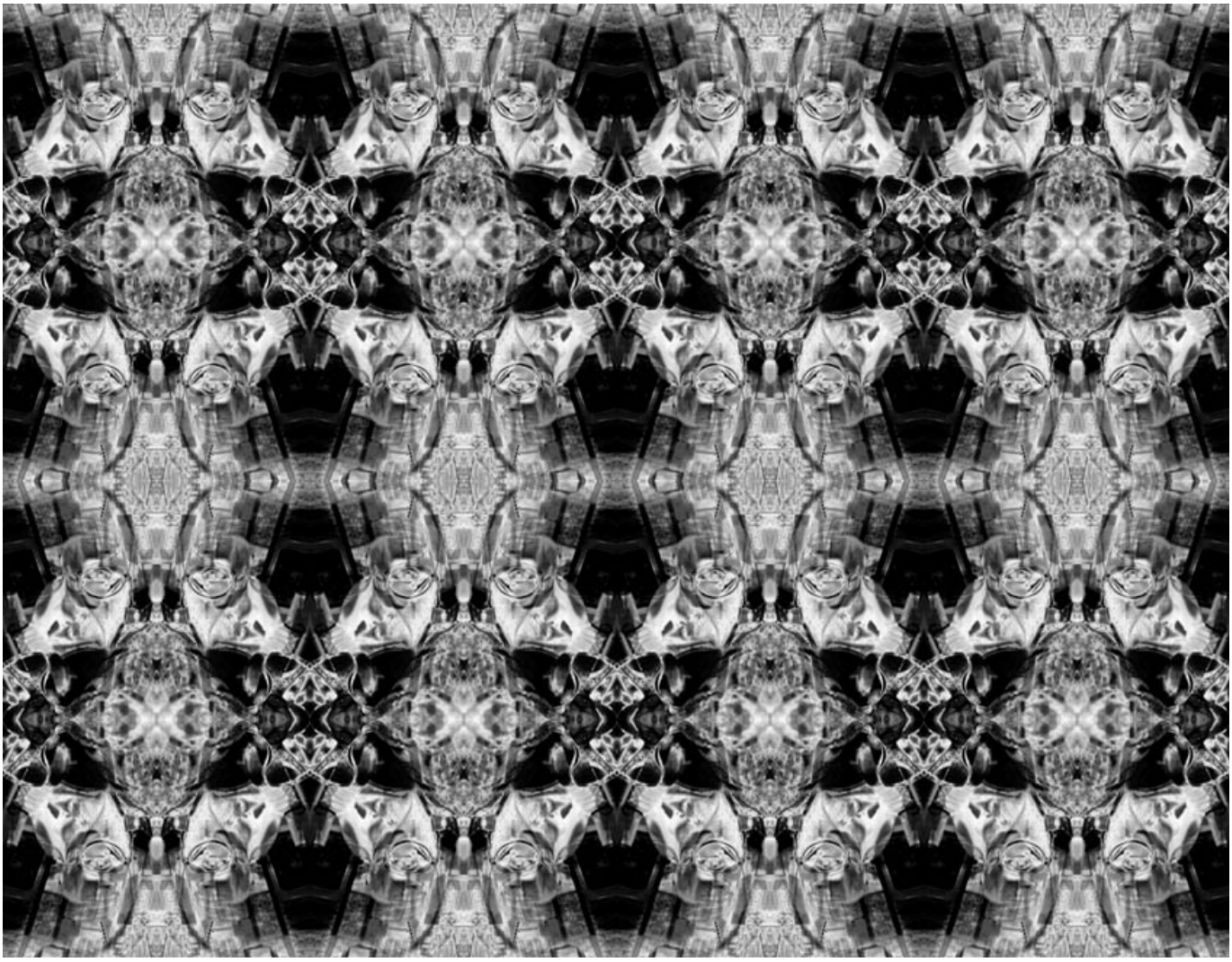
I do like the idea of people coming across the albums and having to work out their own stories for them, much like any record which is in one way a mass produced item and in another totally personal to the individual who engages with it.

EP Track titles, when they do appear, seem to make more sense when read one after the other than singly. The effect they create is like poetry or even lost film titles. That's not a question, but invites a riposte.

AW Much of my writing uses fragmenting narratives or narratives hidden by obtuse translation processes. I find that even when I read the most dislocated text my mind desperately seeks a solution rather than just indulging in the abstract qualities of the words, such that it is evidently unclear as to whether I am involved with the writer's intentions or my own interpretations.

EP Clive Graham has compared your first box set favourably with the music of the LA Free Music Society. I have no idea what he means by that. Do you? Would you agree with him?

AW I only investigated the LA Free Music Society after Clive mentioned it to me, particularly Smegma. The similarity of what we do is probably confined to the similarity of any basic experiments using the same kind of equipment. More recently I heard the first recordings of Henry and Schaeffer which sounded disconcertingly like the primitive tape investigations we were involved in at college.



EP What, broadly speaking, is going on across the four sides of the *Badges* double LP? Is it describable? Do you take delight in bewildering the unwary listener?

AW *Badges* evolved out of another project which was an attempt to create a sketchbook or scrapbook of sounds, a little like a sound effects record. I even included a turning-page cueing signal before each sound or track. Most of the tracks were very short, around a second long. But as I delved further into my personal archive the sounds and interconnections became more complex.

So firstly *Badges* is a collection of sounds from different periods of my past, but their order isn't chronological. there are unfinished projects that are made complete. But then there are others that become undone. Some sounds that were used for one purpose are appropriated for another, whilst others that were left unused are given a purpose. There are sounds that lose meaning or gain another. There is nostalgia. Memories conjured through sound. False memories. Missing sound. Sounds heard one way when in fact they are something other. Lost sounds. Recovered sounds. Reconstructed sounds. May be it's a question of how to define a single sound and a collection of sounds. How sounds are constructed in the head not by receiving them via my ear but through a whole array of mental shaping and falsification.

EP What, ditto ditto, goes on with the Live Saxophone LP? Jazz karaoke?

AW On side one of *Rendezvous* I play along to a 'Music Minus One' record. On side two I use my saxophone part to produce something else entirely but without changing a note. On side one I 'improvise' to some tunes. On side two my saxophone is disconnected from the tunes and reconnected into 'accidental' collisions with itself. On side one the compositional structures are overt in the notes and arrangements. On side two the structure is in the layers and distance of edits. On side one my choices whilst playing are influenced by the tunes. On side two my choices are within the development of the compositional structure. On side one I seem to be playing tunes when in fact I don't play any of them. On side two I seem to doodle around when in fact I totally adhere to the compositional structure. On side one there is an instant familiarity for the listener to entice them to listen. On side two the piece begins at its most impenetrable, almost defying the listener to continue. On side one the fake interaction and fake live atmosphere encourage an illusion of coherence. On side two the abrasive editing makes overt the listener's attempts to apply a coherence. On side one I improvise but know exactly what I'm playing. On side two I structure the composition exactly without knowing how the notes will order themselves. On side one the known tunes seem to become invisible. On side two the unknown composition is

never heard but becomes increasingly present. On side one the concept of music defines the way I listen. On side two the concept of music makes it less certain how or why I should be listening. On side one I feel I am listening to other people as if a spectator. On side two I feel like I'm having to make decisions in order to listen. On side one there is a familiarity. On side two there is an uncertainty. Well, these are some of the ideas and intentions.

EP How did you put together the mammoth 3 LP set *Candy*? Was there a lot of music to choose from? What was your appraisal and selection process?

AW Each track was whittled down from sessions lasting one or two hours. I treat the recordings as sound sources rather than documents of a particular event. The editing is pretty ruthless. I kept the exact order of events as they were recorded but then applied my extreme prejudice in aesthetic judgement in deciding whether something stayed in or was edited out. Ultimately I considered every squeak and pip. There are sometimes hundreds of edits in the space of a few minutes.

There is a wonderful contrast between the spontaneous noisemaking of the sessions and the painstaking editing process of making the tracks for *Candy*. Just the way editing can reshape events, hiding within or dominating the proceedings, is endlessly fascinating.

EP Who is involved in the collective / collaborative works? Is there a pool of regular contributors?

AW There have been quite a few people over the last eighteen years. Tim Wells and Jeremy Warburton were two vital components of the original line-up. Karin Mori joined in about fourteen years ago. More recently Frantisek Sic, Kulo Murugaiyan, and Stephen Drennan have been taking the projects in new directions. I've been recording with Monty of course for over twenty-four years. Really the vitamin b12 accepts anybody who accepts it but it's not really a group you join but remains more a convenient label for putting on the spine of a tape box or Mini Disc.

EP You seem to 'jam' together with various compadres on a regular basis. Do you log / record every single home recording and live performance? What do you with these recordings?

AW Most sessions are recorded but not to the point where I feel obliged to record everything. I prefer to keep the discs and tapes in a state of disorder so that I can lose and rediscover things unexpectedly. That may sound a little contrived but it works quite well.

The recordings never sound anything like the sessions from which they were created but there is enough

information on them for us to examine and be constructively critical of our interactions.

Sometimes they are further tampered with and become other projects.

We do record in a whole variety of ways. At the moment we seem to be focusing on live interaction so the recording set up is minimal and unobtrusive.

EP For solo work, are you prepared to reveal anything about your secret processes? Does it involve sampling, layering and editing? On the other hand, I'm not sure if it matters how it's done.

AW I use everything. Sampling, sequencing, multitracking, relentless editing, computer manipulation, along with compositional and conceptual ideas, systems, simple mathematical procedures, accidents and other fun and games.

EP Your music, and your record collection, betrays quite a substantial preoccupation with easy-listening music. Do you genuinely like this sort of music? How long have you been collecting it? What areas do you like most? Where do you sit in relation to people who can only approach it for its 'irony' or 'kitsch' value?

AW Not sure how I might define easy-listening but I guess I know what areas of music you are alluding to, incidental, life style, mood music and such. Yes, much of it is wonderful, especially the stuff from the 1950s and early 60s.

The 50s music contains some incredible arrangements painted in lurid palettes of freshly discovered recording techniques. Familiarity entwines with totally alien concoctions, creating all kinds of eschewed emotions. Delicious, frightening, deranged.

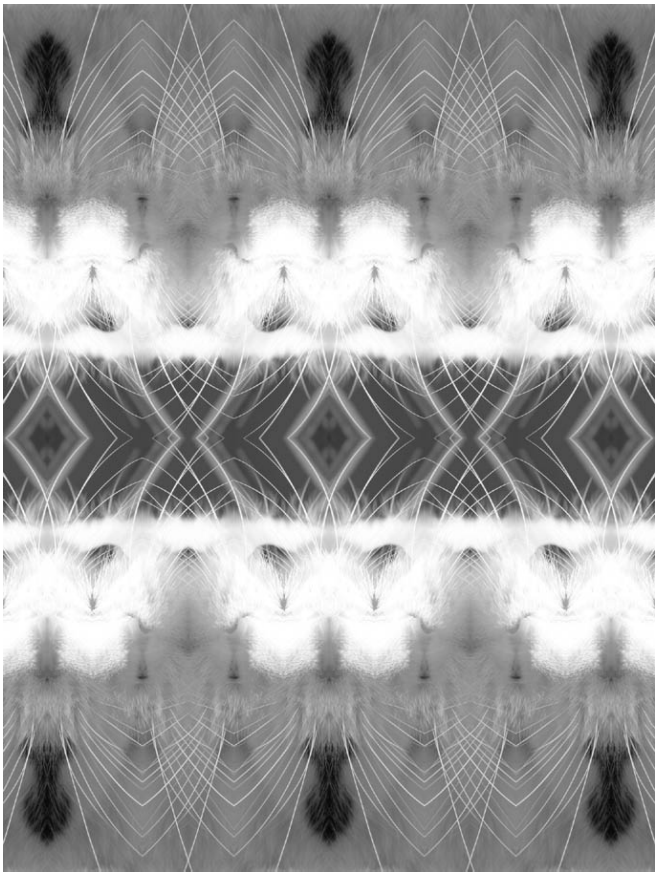
Easy listening was just around when I was young, on TV, in films, and on the radio. It's still now but the form of the music has changed. I bought records of it because they were always the cheapest and some had great covers, so I amassed a little collection quite quickly.

Much easy listening purposely uses irony and kitsch anyway so I don't mind people enjoying it that way.

EP To be fair, maybe you could tell us what other sorts of interesting records you collect. I think you're also keen on electronic music, improvisation, 20th century composers?

AW It's a bit odd thinking of myself as a record collector. I must be as I have walls lined with the things. I tend to buy records that stimulate my curiosity. Initially I'm very influenced by the record cover as often I'm only guessing as to how the contents may sound.

I'm interested in almost everything, steam trains, Xenakis, twist records, Sun Ra, African pop, health and beauty



instructions, anthropological recordings, whatever.

More recently I have been swapping the records I make with other people. It is especially fun when the people I'm swapping with choose the records rather than me having to decide as the results are so much more unexpected.

EP Did you study at art college? What influences and interests did you pick up from there?

AW Once I got to grips with the way college works, not easy at first, it became like a wonderful crazed laboratory, experimenting and investigating whatever I wanted.

It was there I found that for me mistakes and failure were the best ways to proceed and that concepts such as boredom or perfection could be dispensed with entirely with no ill effect.

I first met both Monty and Tim (two B12 members) at college.

Two of my tutors, Al Rees (film) and Michael Parsons (music), were greatly influential on me though they probably found me extremely annoying and would be surprised to learn that I took any notice of them at all.

EP How do you produce your patterned artworks? Do they start out on paper and gradually become digitised, or is it somewhere in between?

AW I tend to use the medium to dictate how the patterns develop. Drawing or painting a pattern is totally different to using a computer, even when the results are similar. I am obsessed with patterns, how they are constructed and the reasons within our methods of perception that enables them to exist.

EP Tell us about some of the literature you read for pleasure, or for ideas, or for other sorts of cerebral stimulation.

AW I do go on about Gertrude Stein a little too much but her investigations into every possible and improbable purpose of language is phenomenal. She is to be celebrated for her total commitment to exploring the world through the process of writing rather than merely using it as a medium through which to communicate her ideas.

I read a quite lot of oral history. I'm fascinated with the differences and connections between spoken and written language. It is the same reason for my interest in folktales which I read in numerous forms and translations.

Anything published by Atlas Press I find well worth checking out. They specialise in translations of Raymond Roussel, Alfred Jarry, the Oulipo and heaps more. I first heard about Konrad Bayer and H C Artmann through them.

I have been reading Merleau-Ponty and Derrida and such but only because whenever I talked to Franta he would refer my ideas to the philosophers he was studying at university.

Did read a lovely book about Anthony Braxton recently. Forces of Motion by Graham Lock. Braxton seems so full of ideas and enthusiasms.

EP You also keep a very intriguing website. Would you say this is a complementary part of your whole package, as it were…how does it add to what you are trying to communicate? Do you have an audience who know you through the web? Does it help sell records?

The website is a little too much like an information point at the moment, rather than taking on a life of its own. I do have a bug bear about documenting and objectifying my work. There's a link to my livejournal which I update now and then. Livejournals seem desperately narcissistic or just plain deluded. Mine's no different.

People do contact me via the website so it may be working as a promotional tool but I haven't a clue how it effects record sales as I have no figures as to how many records I've sold.

I'm not much interested in the passivity of an audience. I prefer some reaction or response that will more directly effect me. This is one of the reasons why I prefer to swap records than to sell them.

EP Could you sum up what The Vitamin B12's message to the world is.

AW Yes, but for now I think I'll allow it to remain encrypted within the work we produce. □

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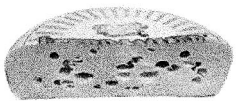

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THE UTTER ⬣FREAKDOM⬣

Simon Wickham-Smith
Rapt
USA DISPOSABLE THUMB RECORDINGS DTR-001 CD [ND]

A release that's obscure as hell, wrapped in a card sleeve that uses antiquated letterpress printing – Heaven knows how I got this, but glad I did! Wickham-Smith is an obstinate and eccentric experimenter, one half of a duo with Richard Youngs (who together played in larger combos sometimes); their self-released vinyl LPs in the early 1990s were curios, sometimes minimal, sometimes droney and noisy, sometimes simply odd jokes which nobody else understood…English maestros of absurdism they were, at play in fields of free experimentation. Here are some of Simon's recent works, dating from 2002 and 2003: one very substantial piece, 2 mid-range works, and three short extracts from a poem suite. All fascinating; entire work described as an exercise in 'wonderment and rapture'.

'Heaven's Gate Sankirtan' is the long track, 35 minutes that should amaze all who hear it. It's a rhythmic collage of looped voices – Africans speaking words of a ritual in Swahili? Tibetan chanting monks? – making something approaching a modernist concrete poem. With its ingenious cross-rhythms and repetitions, this is an update on Steve Reich's 'It's Gonna Rain', is completely nuts and executed with great conviction. Further layers of voices are piled on top as it progresses, disrupting existing rhythms with new ones, and generating an amazing, fascinating, alien cacophony. Steve Reich, for all I know still dining out on his 1960s experiments, finally gets a taste of his own medicine.

'Meiji 13' uses echoed-guitar workouts, perhaps not unfamiliar to those who snagged copy of 1992's *Ceaucescu* LP on Forced Exposure; a lovely, fat sweet chordal mangle treated with maximum distortion. But no empty bruitist statement this; what appears at first to be loose, barely-organised noise is revealed to have depth and structure, a mad unfathomable structure guiding each strum of the strings. 'Perihelion' is more curious still, a gnarled, old, droney-grumble piece probably executed on an unknown device that crosses a sewing machine with a Theremin. I love its obstinacy, its refusal to allow itself to be figured out, the lack of eagerness to please. And it gets even better as it goes on.

'Three Versions of Appreciative' end this odd record. Three short tracks, approx one minute apiece, part of a poetry performance where the reciting voice is treated extensively. In fact it's shoved into nightmare land. The voice struggles to disentangle itself from a steel cobweb of unpleasantness, a hideous mesh of noise…goes form disquieting to outright weird in less than 60 seconds. About the most peculiar CD heard so far this issue…hunt this rarity down, ye seeker of exotic sonic delights, to keep in store with your private greenhouse of cacti, fronds, twisty ferns and spiky jungle plants.

ED PINSENT 05/10/2004
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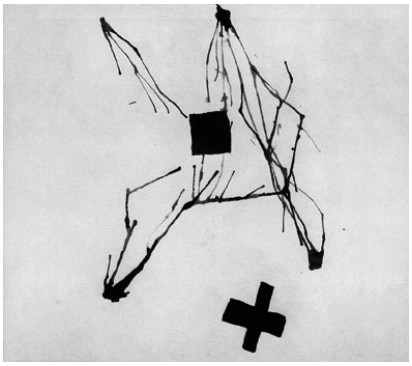
Minimal Self
Formula of Reversal
GERMANY WAVETRAP WAV03 CD (2003)

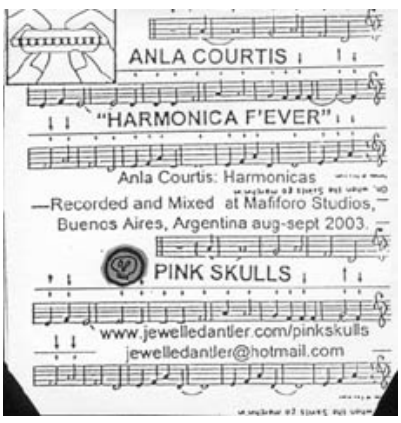
High ambitions here for John Everall, with an unusual solo composition from 2000 and lasting about 50 minutes…it's a descent into the hell of one man's fevered mind. He aims to 'document a period of intense psychological turmoil'. Whether it's his own personal turmoil or that of the local milkman is not made crystal clear, but on balance I would plump for the former…he does it with a very concentrated form of layered, looped and stretched electronic music. The sounds are based on samples of his own speech; the action of manipulation and mutilation is 'an act of concealment which in itself is revealing in much the same way as the "unspeech" of schizophrenics'.



If you pay close attention, it's clear that tremendous mental effort has been poured directly into the hard drive, as the editing and arrangement of the piece is extremely singular. It succeeds perfectly in conveying a harsh and twisted mental landscape; as he navigates across miles and miles of mental-mush, he avoids synthetic processing at all costs in his quest for 'the real'. Something very authentic and 'here and now' about the undeniable 'presence' of it all. Everall had in mind much the same approach as film-maker Len Lye, who scratched his images directly onto celluloid and hoped to 'map the activity of his own nervous system' onto film.

It's possible a sensitive listener could easily 'flip their bananas' if subjected to this piece for too long…as it lurches from one unpredictable episode to the next, it induces claustrophobia, paranoia and other sensations of mental illness, as it depicts a mind coming to the end of its tether. What new stress or pressure awaits him now? Everall also states his avowed aim is to delineate an 'hallucinatory perspective…a web of delusions', no doubt referring to those fervent dreams and paranoid misunderstandings that are the portion of the mentally ill.

John Everall used to be Tactile and Sentrax and produce washy Ambient murk with a sinister edge; and he made at least one record with Nigel Ayers. He dedicates this work to Mad Pride, a UK organisation which 'is about Mental Health System Survivors overcoming discrimination in the UK and all over the World'. The therapeutic value of this music is probably very little; but its imaginative value is colossal. It should be required listening for clinical psychologists, and may even give them a new insight into a field they think they already understand. The cover art here is pretty ineffectual, despite some vague suggestions of 'cracks' and faultlines running through a fragile psyche, and connections to the famous Rorschach inkblot test; as an image it doesn't really convey a true sense of the contents.



I feel I should point out this work is not a self-pitying wallow in mental agony; we can leave all that to cry-babies of lesser stature. It's a serious and level-headed artistic study of a mental condition.

ED PINSENT 04/10/2004
www.wav.post-pop.org

Courtis
(The name of this drone is hidden in your DNA)
UNITED KINGDOM NIDNOD NO NUMBER CDR (2004)

Anla Courtis
"...y el resplandor de la luz no conoce limites."
FINLAND 267 LATTAJJAA LTJ-25 3" CD (2004)

Anla Courtis
Fractal Albur Solenoide
23PRODUCTIONS 23CD0121 3" CD (2004)

Anla Courtis
Harmonica F'Ever
USA PINK SKULLS NO NUMBER 3" CD (2004)

Since the Reynols band has recently been terminated and the 'project' of working with Miguel Tomasin (the Down's syndrome genius) has run its course, Anla Courtis finds himself with time on his hands and seems set to devote it to pursuing a solo musical career. In terms of quantity at least, he's hit the ground running so far. This ish we've received a bunch of Courtis solo mini-discs released on tiny micro-edition labels from across the four corners of the globe. All of these are of passing interest, although the prize is scooped by his intense collaboration with Lasse Marhaug on the Antifrost label, compared with which these minis come across as rather half-finished ideas, doodles or preparatory sketches. On the positive side, it's good to report that Courtis is no less committed to the 'absurdist' principles that seemed to guide every step in the Reynols saga, but somehow the music we hear lacks complete conviction. Perhaps it takes the far-out, mystical insights of a Miguel Tomasin to push Courtis into the 'zone'. The other stumbling block for this listener with this motley collection of CDRs is that they don't sound terribly interesting, nor are they packaged very well. But the intrepid listener should not be deterred…Courtis is a clever and talented man and will prove, like Morrissey and Peter Gabriel before him, that there is hope for you after the band split…

The DNA drone CD comes with a mock-solemn statement of conceptual dimensions stated on back cover. This work is apparently 'an imperfect audible manifestation of an inaudible drone that did not begin and will never end…' This kind of self-cancelling, contradictory remark was meat and drink to the Reynols programme of befuddlement; when asked how the band got started, Courtis replied 'Reynols didn't begin yet'. You can't help but raise your eyebrows at the idea of music which can't be heard; this almost shades into Firework Edition / Leif Elggren territory (see elsewhere) although Courtis is being totally tongue-in-cheek. Well, what's on this particular disc is audible enough – about 36 minutes of a wind-tunnel styled roar, much like a slowed-down recording of a devastating tornado. And a lot of tape hiss which has accumulated during the process, presumably. Somehow I feel this should really knock me for six, but it doesn't…the body quickly gets used to it, and it's no worse than bobbing up and down on a slightly choppy ocean seated in a rubber dinghy. Recorded in Buenos Aires, and salvaged from various inconclusive tape experiments made in 1996, now 'rebaked' in 2004. Not an unbearable noise, but of very marginal interest at best. This is the first release from this Ipswich-based label of which we have taken note; others have, I suspect, been little more than pranks.

Resplandor...this studio construct, another 'not-quite there' project by Courtis, was executed with electric guitar, organ, harmonica and bells, and a lot of studio processing. The reverb effect in particular is somewhat over-used; in fact it's little more than a straight-ahead drone, with many layers. Rather ordinary for this maverick prince of weirdness; not unpleasant, but does it gain anything through association with the lengthy literary epithet? It translates as 'The Glimmer of the Light knows no limits' and comes from the works of Plotinus, an early philosopher who seemed preoccupied with the wholeness and connectedness of everything. This Finnish mini-label has put out 27 releases by numerous obscurities; anybody collecting the set? *Fractal Albur Solenoide* is similarly pseudo-scientific and is apparently made with a shareware fractal sound generator. The Harmonica record is another studio concoction, another botched work…three short experiments using only overdubbed harmonica. Only of interest if you care to study his rudimentary studio technique; there's certainly little enjoyment to be had in admiring his technique, the artless, frenetic puffing he applies to these instruments. For the second cut, he achieves a fairly eerie droning effect that successfully transforms the original sound and discovers some depth in the confines of that rather narrow instrument; but the other two tracks are simply irritating, restless masses of noise buzzing around like swarms of pesky mosquitoes. A bit like Larry Adler trying to play 'Pretty Vacant', or something. You must exert yourself more next time, Anla!

ED PINSENT 10-11/2004
wlightj@yahoo.com
www.a-version.co.uk/nidnod
www.dlc.fi/~hhaahti/267lattajjaa/
www.demiurgic.net/23productions

jewelledantler@hotmail.com
www.jewelledantler.com/pinkskulls

Courtis / Marhaug

North and South Neutrino
GREECE ANTIFROST AFRO2021 CD (2003)

Two of my personal favourite 'eccentrics' of noise and sound-art put their noggins together here…or at the very least they swap their sound files in the mail. They are joined in spirit by a third eccentric, Leif Elggren, who drew the bizarre figures on the sleeve. Marhaug is a northerly man, from the land of the midnight sun where the hot springs blow; Courtis a southerner, where they play the rumba on the tuba down in Cuba. Accordingly the source material used in this shocker was recorded in Norway and Argentina, ie the home countries of both. Clearly, this 'polar opposites' theme has inspired the title for this outrage; because of their respective poles-apart locations, they clearly see themselves as mutually non-attractive subatomic particles within the huge molecule that is mainstream music. How marginal can they be?

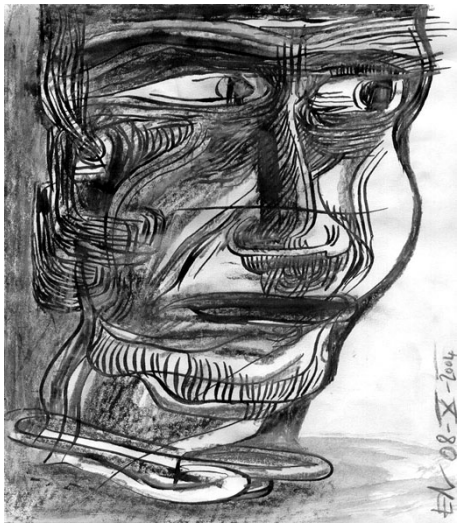
Given the various 'case histories' of these two loons and their penchant for excess, plenty, abrasiveness and overall propensity for weirdness, we're slightly surprised to find this is mostly an ultra-quiet minimal basket of bytes…or so it appears, until the entire disc be spun. It starts off with something inaudible, which gradually reveals itself to be a sub-sonic digital hum, relieved with a very faint static crackle to break up the monotony. Oddly enough, having spun the *Good Morning, Good Night* CD last night, I find this is completely different. Just goes to show ya that not all digits are the same, even at this level of Baryons, Mesons and Quarks. This basic whining hum gets pretty damn intense as the two clowns behind the control panel crank up the voltmeter, although at this early stage we still don't have much to 'get off' on. You could pause at this juncture, and dash out to a party where James Brown records are playing, if you need to shake your funky ass for 5 mins.

Meanwhile back at home the noise continues. If you played this stuff in a crowded room, chances are no-one would even notice what you were doing at first, until they started bleeding from their eyelids. In fact, I just tried that experiment at the party I was just at…and it worked like a charm, me dears! If you can endure hearing this until the 13 minute mark, the hidden structure of *North and South Neutrino* starts to reveal itself, in way that records by F López used to do if you stuck with them enough…already one suspects the ingenuity in the construction is almost mathematical. The rise and fall method is on a par with Reynols' *Blank Tapes*. A stripped-down narrative emerges, much like a very avant-garde comic strip composed entirely of blank panels 1cm wide.

Eventually this totally abstract work grows into a rather threatening bass drone effect with a shrill, ringing accompaniment. Quite unfathomable. Indeed, even when you think it has nowhere left to go, it deftly turns a new

corner and shows another piece in the jigsaw puzzle. Eventually you start to see the real scale of this thing…what you thought was a tiny microbe, and then a caterpillar, is now a monstrous beetle the size of a subway train 25 coaches long, eating out a network of tunnels through the globe with its powerful jaws. We have travelled in 40 minutes from one extreme of sound to the other, from pole to pole, from North to South neutrino. A remarkable modernist statement.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2004
www.antifrost.gr
www.lassemarhaug.no
www.geocities.com/valubamafiforo



aNoMaLi

nitya-baddha
UNITED KINGDOM HYPNAGOGIA NAG02 10" VINYL LP (2003)

Effective and disturbing weirdness from Mr aNoMaLi here; it would be too glib and easy to write him off as just another cut-up artiste, when the residual effects of his experiments reach a lot deeper into the recesses of the mind than many dabblers in that area. His 'mindisturb' A-side is a trawl through the aural wreckage of 20th century culture; TV and radio samples, cut up and collaged with fierce determination to force new meanings out of them, and played over a nasty buzzing drone. Each juxtaposition of dialogue / words / samples reeks of subtle and bitter sarcasm, aiming for satirical effect. But he also aims for maximum worrisome effect, and the muffling and mangling of certain segments obliges listener to strain to catch that fleeting meaning. Subliminal methods probably at work here. This side finishes up with what sounds like a church choir sample, played backwards, and it's very distinctive. Could be a strong anti-religion statement intended by this, although it also puts me in mind of something by Legendary Pink Dots from the mid 1980s.

'antimatters' uses further voice samples, suspended in gloomy murky abstract noises; this one includes the 'dentist drill' segment used, I seem to recall, on a collaboration with The New Blockaders. There's a faint electronic murmur-pulse behind the surface noise, only barely perceivable, yet very troubling and conducive to subliminal feelings of paranoia, doubt and irritation. Subversive intentions, a record to upset the mind.

ED PINSENT 30/10/2004
www.hypnagogia.org.uk

Die Tödliche Doris

Fallersleben
GERMANY VINYL-ON-DEMAND VOD 7 VINYL LP (2004)

This German combo released a whole bunch of records between 1980 and 1986, which I've never heard; this unfortunate gap in my musical education was not however rectified by the following LP. In fact it's doubtful whether this product even contains the music of Die Tödliche Doris at all. In 1981, it seems, they played a great live concert that never got taped. Then they recently met a mad scientist who could retrieve sounds from the past with his time-travelling tape recorder. The results of his work are pressed into this vinyl-only release. I'm not kidding; they believe it's a spirit recording of that concert. Without going into any detail, the sleeve note refers to the loopy theories of Friedrich Jürgenson and his extensive collection of tapes of voices of the dead. The same 'principle', if you can call it that, was applied here. One to file alongside the Firework Edition records. Is the story worth retelling? The music ain't worth listening to. It's a queasy mass of mangled, over-processed, garbled electronic spew.

ED PINSENT 30/10/2004
www.vinyl-on-demand.com

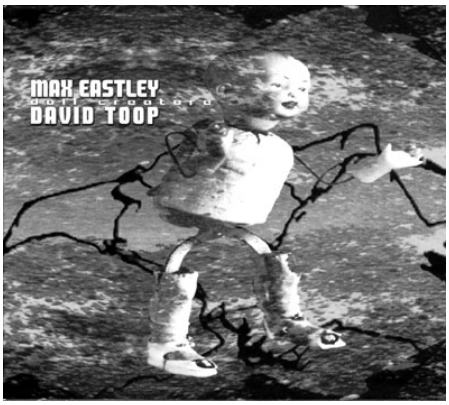
Dylan Nyoukis and Karen Constance

Here Comes Blood Stereo
GREECE ABSURD #37 CD [2004]

A four-track shocker from Scots underground noise legend Nyoukis, who also performs in Prick Decay / Decaer Pinga. This one is realised with the help of Karen Constance, a very distinctive and imaginative fine art painter, also Scots, based in Brighton just now

– that city may provide a sympathetic environment for her colourful paintings, that conceal much heavy weirdness in their apparently innocent imagery. The release itself on the Greek Absurd label might contain some 'insider' references to personalities and events within the underground music network, of which the full significance eludes me. My ears tell me however that this is an exciting and troublesome noise, that does not repel through harshness, but leaves an indelible stain on the mind. Nyoukis is clearly an expert at constructing and managing these potentially unruly elements; I haven't heard anything quite like this, in terms of its controlled combination of harsh, soft and organic noise, suspended together in an imaginary space. The layered madness of it all brings pounding bashes and soothing droning together within the space of a single musical phrase. Quite ingenious…underlying the entire record is a hearty conviction (perhaps shared by both its creators) that the world is a sick and twisted place and that absolutely nothing can be done to put matters right. Their heartfelt concern for global affairs and human welfare is most audible on the third of these untitled tracks, which is unspeakably horrific. Analogue electronics, detreated and deranged, are shrieking for mercy like some mad 1950s gigantic databank, while disembodied and distorted voices swarm around the air like legions of ghosts from the previous World War. *Here Comes Blood Stereo* is a small parcel of compelling, farout weirdness; a fragment of diseased genius.

ED PINSENT 01/11/2004
www.anet.gr/absurd/releases.htm



Max Eastley / David Toop
Doll Creature
FRANCE BIP-HOP BLEEP 25 CD (2003)

Is there anything scarier than the image of a 'living doll'…even that crass pop-art movie *Barbarella* understood the horrifying implications of it, and used a small army of wind-up dolls fanged with metallic teeth in their mechanical jaws. The doll-creature proposed here by Toop and Eastley belongs in slightly artier realms, a kind of toned-down version of, say, the monstrous baby in *It's Alive!*, the video-nasty by Larry David. The original sound sources for this nightmare came from the mechanical sound sculptures of Eastley, an area he's been working in since the 1970s; Toop's task was to transform them in his computer with 'additions and manipulations.' The homunculus in question also seems to have sprung from mind of Toop, who provides poetic prose-text insert which tells a story, and he assisted I think with visualisation on front cover; parts of doll plastic shell are missing, revealing strong mechanical legs. 'At least he has the boots for the job,' observes press note blithely. Doll strides forth blindly. What art thou about, o strange effigy, and whither do you go?

To answer that question, read enclosed text while spinning disc. Some form of story-telling is indeed descried within this package, but it's rather inconclusive and vague. The main core of interest comes from this constant tension on each track, a tug-of-war between lush, echoed and processed sounds, like deep and dark ambient music; and the more primitive, acoustic, plinking and clacking sounds, as though produced by stones and sticks of bamboo. This, I suppose, is an aural counterpart to the narrative theme, expressing the same tension between the basic mind and simple movements of this hideous automaton, and the broad-sweep cinematic 'landscapes' which it traverses and explores through the course of its adventures. If so, this could be read as a very sympathetic attempt on behalf of Toop and his cohort Eastley to enter into the very soul and spirit of his doll-creation.

Obviously, to complete this experience we need more than just one CD cover image…what's needed is an entire Channel Four 1989-styled film animation, replete with shadows, flashing lights, saturated colours, and grotesques from the mind of Mervyn Peake. Yes, I realise I'm pretty much describing the work of the Brothers Quay (of which I'm not a huge fan). Although the tale told hereon lacks conventional form, one almost feels one's back in 1970s concept-LP land; could this be a post-modern *Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* or, heaven help us, *Olias of Sunhillow*? One hopes not, but just check out some of those track titles…seriously, Toop and Eastley do go back a long way as pioneers of gallery sound art, improvisation, and studies in world music; and it's impressive how convincingly they have adapted to new technology and new ways of expressing ideas in musical forms.

ED PINSENT 28/09/2004
BP 64, 13192 Marseille cedex 20, France
lp@bip-hop.com
www.bip-hop.com

Gal
Hinaus:: In den, Wald.
AUSTRIA KLANGGALERIE GG52 CD (2004)

Bernhard Gal's fourth album is a journey inside the mind of a disturbed, solipsistic individual. Adolf Wölfli (1864-1930) was a Swiss who spent a deprived childhood as a farmhand. He was imprisoned for sexual attacks on young girls before being transferred to the mental hospital where he spent the last 35 years of his life. While there he created a 25,000-page opus of detailed texts and illustrations. It is Wölfli's status as an outsider artist that forms the basis for Gal's enquiry into his life and work.

The disc consists of recordings of Wölfli's texts, which he wrote in German and in an invented language, recited by Gal and by a young Taiwanese girl. (Some of the texts are reproduced in the CD booklet.) Interspersed with these are field recordings of a man making his way through a forest. The sleevenotes say that the latter are intended to express Wölfli's 'permanent creative urge.' The overall effect is disturbing, for several reasons. The girl has an uninflected, naturally pure voice, while Gal's own often whispered voice ranges in timbre from the idle to the threatening. Together, the voices uneasily register the presence of victim and assailant. The forest sounds, whatever the intention, strongly evoke Wölfli's estranged status.

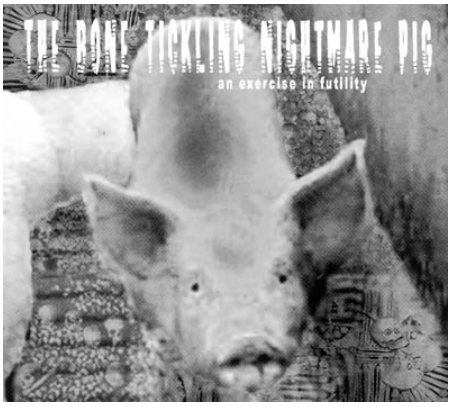
Gal is primarily a sound artist, and *Hinaus:: In den, Wald* was originally the soundtrack of an installation - a dark, immersive sonic environment. It's easy to imagine how disorientating these recordings must have been in this context, and the sleevenotes recommend listening on headphones in darkness to approximate the effect. Without the full spatial awareness given by the installation, listening to the CD is a necessarily incomplete, yet still powerful experience.

RICHARD REES JONES
www.bernhardgal.com

Various Horrible Loons
(si'kə-dĕl'ik) volume one
USA PSYCHFORM RECORDS PFR01CD CD (2004)

An American compilation of fairly far-out international weirdies; some (like The Haters and Christian Renou) are fairly well-established underground denizens, and I have heard mad records by Mixed Band Philanthropist and The Broken Penis Orchestra.

Contagious Orgasm (ie Hiroshi Hashimoto) opens the set, and goes for a disquieting collage of foreign voices, car alarms, and mysterious minor-key chords. Very tense, nervous, headache-type music. This track stakes out the ground, lets you know from the start exactly what the compilers mean by



'Psychedelic': no cosmic hippy happiness, no peace and love, no good vibes. Instead, bad trips, too much acid, horrifying hallucinations, Charles Manson. Indeed the very title suggests preoccupation with and morbid delight in 'Sick-a-Delic' sounds, and to cap it all there's a horrific apparition on the cover of a purple, gnome-like baby lurking inside a lurid, multi-coloured cave. Said gnome will be the least of your worries, believe me. Noggin are a duo who make music with taut violin strings and guitars, producing a kind of alternative *Psycho* soundtrack, and opts for aimless pattering of metal percussion. Soon your nerves will be as taut as those violin strings, as hairs start bristle on nape of neck. John Wiese casts his 'Reversed Spells', making musical movements as alarmingly as Kenneth Anger performing a Black Mass; he offers deeply unnatural grinding sounds and animalistic grunts, mixed in with a collage of electronic whirls of insanity.

So far, so good…somehow this compilation reeks of 'old school' weirdness, and might not have looked out of place on either the United Dairies or LAYLAH labels, one suspects; which isn't a bad thing. Rowenta and Khan appear next, turning in a loopy collage of beats, foreign voices, vile synth tones, echo chambers and rattling necklaces. These two used to be in HNAS. This one isn't as nightmarish as other cuts here, it's just plain deranged. Some comfort, some choice; would you rather have a ten-day drug-induced nightmare, or face a homicidal maniac with a large axe? Christian Renou is here too; he used to be Brume and (I gather) produced not a few science-fiction styled electronic wasteland-scapes under said monicker. Here, though, he's pretty dull – a stretch of yawnsome grey ambient sludge.

Grillhaus have a whole LP on this label. Odd electronica samples is all that they can manage here. The Haters are old lags (25 years) in this game. They come up with a good threatening noise here, seething with brooding anger and secreting bile...you could grind your teeth in time with it. The final track is a collaborative effort by MBP and BPO, and it is highly effective too. A screwed-up montage work using the manic jump-cut editing approach that's one of BPO's trademarks, and many clever and quite distressing collisions of sounds and speech. Obscenities jumbled up with adverts; easy-listening juxtaposed with classical music. This kind of thing can be traced back to its origins in Negativland and People Like Us respectively. However, this example has real ingenuity at its core. It's also extremely nasty and sardonic, thus a fitting end to a comp that attempts to sap your sense of reality, and draw back the veil to reveal the filthy mind and twisted psyche that characterises today's putrid world.

ED PINSENT 20/10/2004
www.psychform.com

Various Greasy Hogs
The Bone Tickling Nightmare Pig: an exercise in futility
USA PSYCHOCHRIST PRODUCTIONS PCP01 CD (2004)

Much like the comp above on same parent label, this monster was spawned on similar horrifying turf…however instead of bad acid, this one is themed around oodles of sick black humour. 'An excellent surreal sound explosion,' is how the makers describe it, with many an oink and grunt..who dare gainsay that? The Pig has been grounded in the realms of absurdity, mental instability, and a completely wackoid sense of fun. Zany comedy by grotesque clowns…think of the Robert Crumb clowns, who smack you in the face with a cyanide pie. The Pig himself is set to leap out of his sty on the cover, and wreak havoc in the world; his skin is tinted green, creating a queasy sensation. Further pranksterism inside the sleeve, which is packed with tiny feathers, as though The Pig were equipped with a pelt of that natural covering (Pigs might fly…)

16 cuts, 16 contributors – virtually everything here has something 'wrong' with it, which is to say that the sound is so far removed from mainstream convention or normality that it passes on the unwelcome sensation that the world is sick, utterly warped beyond repair or control. All tracks are pretty convincing in this way; some are slow, abstract dream worlds, like the one by IDXI274, trapping you in an unpleasant dream where your every move is in slow motion. Some are hyper-fast, like the one by Cybercantautores de Mierda, where events in the nightmare world are moving so quickly you have no idea where to turn. Mixed Band Philanthropist use gibbering voices and animal cries, shrieking among layers of hellish noise and looped human voices. This Rupenus track is a 'golden oldie' rescued from 1983, when it came out on a tape called The Slaughter of Innocents. Anomali and The Broken Penis Orchestra do similar freaking-out sample exercises. Some of the pieces use musical instruments, but only as another sound-source with which to trouble your fevered brain, like the thugs shaking a percussive wooden stick on the track by Nequaquam Vacuum.

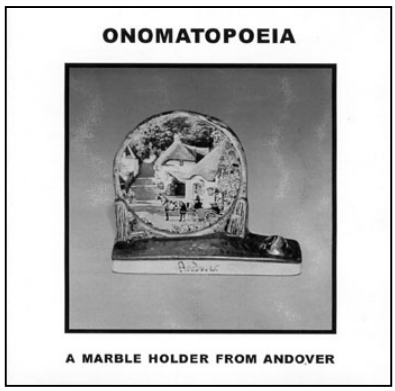
Comprising bonkers electronic music, tape work and samples for the most part, The Pig aims simply to disturb and unsettle the mind with unfamiliar sounds, perplexing dynamics, inexplicable titles, and a pervading atmosphere of neurosis, doom and strangeness. It's not out to shock you instantly, like power electronics or noise; it's done with slowness and deliberation, by very clever manipulators, desirous of sharing and spreading their unhealthy interest in the sick and the horrible. A few clichés from that school of thought creep in; the use of an old medical tape, for example, with a speaking voice describing the workings of the female anatomy. But in the final analysis, this isn't music that's ugly for its own sake; it simply has a very twisted notion of what should be considered aesthetically beautiful. Watch out for this pig…he stings and he bites.

ED PINSENT 08/11/2004
www.psychochrist.com

John Duncan
Phantom Broadcast
ITALY ALLQUESTIONS AQ 04 CD (2002)

Essentially this is just one very long (and I mean very long) dronescape, derived I think largely from shortwave radio sources, that stretches its entire 47-minute running time to the aural equivalent of watching paint dry. The music is shaped to suggest a ghostly or angelic choir singing with ongoing subtle variations suggestive of changes in the weather that really don't affect the basic sound or its unrelentingly linear direction. So much could have been done with this choir, but Duncan has given its members only one song to sing and while we can appreciate that he wants to leave the song's development as 'organic' as possible and let the choir direct its tune, the result is not at all interesting let alone challenging. Now it is said that the Devil has the best tunes so if *Phantom Broadcast* be the sound of Heaven ... well, what the Hell are we waiting for?

JENNIFER HOR
www.allquestions.net



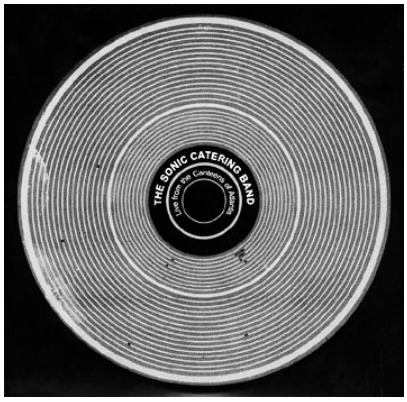
Onomatopoeia
A Marble Holder from Andover
UNITED KINGDOM CHEESES INTERNATIONAL CI10 CD [2003]

Something of a strange and attractive oddity…1 short 20-minute track is on offer from Mr Cheeses International, dating from 1996 and one presumes a solo work constructed entirely in the recording studio and performed in the bricolage-collage style.

Bass, synths and percussion join forces with non-musical detritus such as metallic junk, plus there's the obligatory found tapes and radio static. Operates to certain extent in the Nurse With Wound area, in that it's a studio assemblage with disquieting undertones and continually lurches around in ominous, unpredictable way, much like a blind troll stomping out his kingdom of clay, while surrounded by that ever-present fog of lugubrious, murky studio effects.

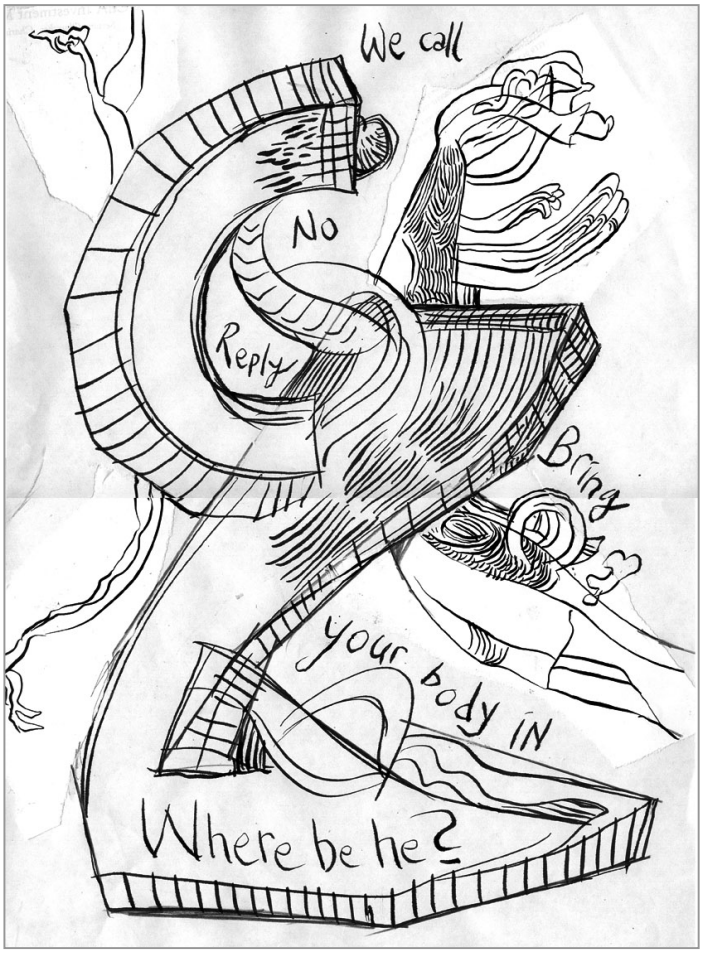
Despite shortish length, the *Marble Holder* succeeds in insinuating itself under your pelt in effective ways. Lulling you into false sense of security with vague droney and clattering opening, a harmonica suddenly hoves into view after some five minutes. Eerie sound of said instrument is decidedly unnerving, as though played by some magical ogre from fifth dimension, openly laughing at primitive ways of foolish mankind. Thereafter assorted ghostly synth wails accompany a spirited bout of metal-bashing; warped qualities increase, and overall sense of violence and menace start to induce visions (in my case) of outsize laboratory mice, squealing in pain as tortured to death on metallic surgeon's table. There is, in fine, a kind of gleeful abandon to this rugged, slightly destructive, approach to making music, and it doesn't lack for humour…indeed any serious or solemn tone is undercut by images and text of sleeve art, of which front and back design are certainly whimsical, while interior is downright Vic Reeves-surrealist working-men's club style. Fine work.

ED PINSENT 20/09/2004
BCM Cheese, London WC1N 3XX
steve.cheeses@btinternet.com



The Sonic Catering Band
Live from the Canteens of Atlantis
GREECE ABSURD # 30 2 x CD (2003)

Begobs - not another record involving sounds derived from food…well, perhaps there haven't been that many, but some time ago we did receive a copy of the notorious 'vegetable orchestra' CD, a German project producing sounds made out of vegetables transformed into instruments (eg hollowed-out carrot becomes wind instrument). Natch, since so much electronic enhancement was needed to beef up these inert legumes, the actual sounds heard on disc were indistinguishable from 99% of modern electronica – which is to say, utterly boring…which is why we didn't give it any notice at the time. So, how do Sonic Catering Band measure up?



The Sonic Catering Band created sounds out of cooking. They did it by cooking 'live' on stage, sometimes dressed in chef's whites, following a recipe and using pots, pans, mixers and bowls, while resulting sounds – such as they were – were reprocessed and transformed using live electronics. Somewhere midway between experimental music and performance art I suppose, and informed by an absurdist notion. The live sounds are constantly mutated and transmogrified, in ways that tend to suggest replication of the cooking process itself…cooking can be seen simply as a process of constant change. The chopping knife on the board can turn into beats; the clatter of pots and pans can become percussion. Frying and bubbling liquids change into an unholy brewing murk.

This 2-disc set is the final statement by, and sort of a retrospective history of, this short-lived and perplexing project which existed around 1998-2001 (though website suggests they're making a comeback just now). The first disc is a fine panoramic suite involving lots of editing and compression; you're given a whole sweep of unusual and bewildering sounds, with little information to make it comprehensible…everything keeps changing, and though there's a fair amount of routine beats and tedious ambient wash, it's mostly a big success. You can also hear the audience (or perhaps diners in a canteen) slavering their chops in appreciation. Curiously, one effect it can have is to make food seem very alien and unappetising – it sure doesn't sound delicious, no matter how tasty end product may have been. Second disc is not edited highlights – rather it's a document of an entire performance, and it's much quieter and less relentless. Given extremely minimal start to proceedings (and that the intended effect was mostly visual), it comes over as solemn and perplexing as a Samuel Beckett play. Each chop of the knife stands out as starkly as a rifle shot!

Members seemed to come and go, although deployment of cooking appliances has been credited to Peter Strickland and live manipulation of sound to Colin Fletcher and Tim Kirby. They released not a few limited-edition singles – each usually devoted to a single recipe, and seem in retrospect to be as puzzled about what they were doing as everyone else. The whole deal might put one in mind of Project D.A.R.K. (with whom I think SCB did once – unknowingly – share art gallery space), but this project is a little better. That said, they tend to solve the same problem (inertness of sound) with the same lazy solution, ie over-use of digital delay and other common FX. Still, it's half-interesting that recipes were followed – this gives the work some structure – and makes you wonder if completed dish of tasty food was ever dished up at end of concert to satisfy hungry audience.

ED PINSENT 19/09/2004
www.anet.gr/absurd/releases.htm

The Magic Band and The Fall

Live at the Royal Festival Hall 23rd January 2004

Blow me down, here we have another dubious South Bank double-header. Which is not to say that there isn't a connection of sorts between the bands on the bill: The Fall's Mark E Smith is well known to be a Beefheart fan (although it's doubtful whether the feeling is mutual) and he paid tribute to the Magic Band back in 1996 with a ragged Peel session cover of Beetle Bones 'n' Smoking Stones (by way of the riff from Electricity). For a brief few seconds tonight it looked like the Magic Band might reciprocate with a cover 'Hip Priest'; alas that was not to be. There's a huge gulf between The Fall's loose minimalism and the Magic Band's intricate compositions, not to mention the skill levels of the different bands: The Fall supposedly don't rehearse, whereas the Magic Band know their parts like the backs of their hands. What they do have in common though are charismatic, visionary and stubborn leaders with a utilitarian and distanced approach to their band members and an overpowering belief in the imagination. Smith has also picked up more than a few mind-manipulation tricks from Beefheart (as well as Sun Ra) and given half a chance you can bet he'd be only too happy to lock his band in a room for six months with nothing but pebbles and sand for food.

Whether or not that's grounds for putting these groups together is highly debatable. But if, as it turned out, the bands didn't exactly do each other any favours, the evening did at least provide the opportunity to indulge in some gratuitous generalisations about the respective bands' audiences - short-haired and thin Fall fans, and long-haired and fat Magic Band fans, you know the score. Personally I've got short hair and a growing waistline, and that's because I like them both.

First up were The Fall. Occasionally a Fall gig is electric from start to finish, but more often than not it's like a compressed-timescale Grateful Dead concert – the band stumble along without inspiration or conviction for the first half, until out of nowhere something clicks and they lock into an awesome and spooky groove. A brief flicker of Fall magic did indeed come during the subdued second half of Janet, Johnny + James, which was played very slow ("so that Smith could keep up", observed my other half) – the guitarist and drummer teasing out a subtle and beautiful new twist on the tune. But there was no chance for this spark to ignite as the gig was abruptly curtailed after just 40 minutes (a short set length even by Fall standards) in order to make way for the headliners.

This was the third of six (!) Fall performances taking place in London between December 2003 and February 2004, and the highest profile. Not that this meant Smith would treat it with any sense of occasion, in fact it's more likely he took the opposite approach faced with such a, let's face it, bourgeois event: in contrast to his controlled demeanour at the stunning pre-Xmas Islington Academy gigs, he was palpably half cut at the RFH - as bad as I've seen him during many years of attending Fall concerts - and his band could only try their best to make the songs sound okay whilst he made half-arsed attempts at forming words, came in late on lyrics, and left them stewing on the same riff for eternity whilst they waited for the cue for the song to end. That's the downside of Smith's approach: when it all comes together The Fall are breathtaking, but the strict no-improvisation regime leaves his musicians unable to adapt when things go wrong. Paradoxically, the best moments here arose from improvisation, when MES messed with his band's equipment: turning up a guitar amp to ridiculous volume, or banging out great little atonal declarations on the keyboard.

Journalists have often made doomy pronouncements about the band's future based on such below-par evenings, but it would be wrong to read any trend into it – just as a good Fall gig is no indicator that the next one will be any cop, the equivalent goes for a bad one. It's sad though that the Magic Band's professionalism and showmanship would make Smith's antics look rather pathetic and self-defeating, just as Dick Dale's performance did a few years before when he played with them at the same venue.

On to the reformed Magic Band - this is of course a reconstituted version of Beefheart's combo, featuring Magic Band members who never played together as a unit, and John 'Drumbo' French taking the place of the errant Captain on vocal duties. This latter prospect in particular has quite reasonably bothered a lot of people, but strangely the whole thing worked like a dream.

And there were plenty of signs that it wouldn't. Superficially the show played out like a cheesy 80s stadium event, complete with instrumental section, and embarrassing drum solo. Some numbers seemed to have been included just to allow the musicians to show off their chops, a misguided act of democracy which I imagine the Captain wouldn't have countenanced. The band even looked like a stadium act, resembling a skewed version of ZZ Top crossed with Toto, in their uncoordinated wide-brimmed hats, bandanas and hippy-dandy wear: long gone are the bizarre costumes of the Trout Mask Replica era, that's for sure.

But it was great to see them enjoying themselves - they deserve it, having put up with obscurity and disinterest the first time round. Mark 'Rockette Morton' Boston exuded delight as he waltzed round the stage, belly first and shoulders back, like a chipper Oliver Hardy taking a Sunday stroll. John French got into his new role with more gusto than I imagine Beefheart ever showed on stage, as he darted around, whirled his arms and made sudden chopping actions like someone desperately trying to back up a wild and unsubstantiated assertion.

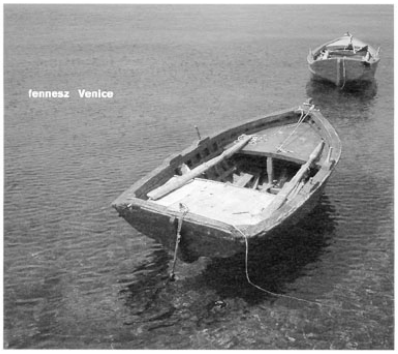
Amazingly, this was only the Magic Band's 4th gig since reforming. A couple of times they wandered off the beat or were thrown by technical problems (stopping a song so that Gary Lucas could tune his guitar… now that's something that The Fall would never allow!) But that aside, they kicked rock ass and made sense as a live band in a way that I for one had never considered likely, even in their heyday. Tracks that I'd paid little attention to on record ('Floppy Boot Stomp', 'Sun Zoom Spark') sounded fantastic here, booming out at great volume, and others that were obscured by the mix on record (such as 'Hair Pie') were performed clear as a bell. The weirdest thing of all was just how accessible and natural such supposedly difficult music sounded in this context, with band and audience alike obviously delighting in hearing such great music being performed so well and being kept alive. No doubt about it, these songs should be standards!

And whatever your reservations about the whole project, this isn't just a tribute band. The guys here sweated blood to learn (and in some cases write) the music, and it's fair to say they have a big stake in it, even if Beefheart was the critical catalyst. And the music isn't something that any jobbing muso will be able to play, unless they're a masochist or Henry Kaiser. (That said, the new drummer, Michael Traylor, who only flirted with original Magic Band membership, fitted in without any trouble). True, it is bizarrely convenient and slightly creepy that Drumbo turned out to a spot-on Beefheart impersonator (not to mention a mean harmonica player), but I guess it was too good a trick for the band to miss.

But whilst there may be nowhere for a Beefheart-less Magic Band to go from here (other than to become a fixture on the retro circuit), I'm very very glad to have seen them on such great form. Splendid as this gig was, it in no way makes me want to hear 'Back to the Front', their recent studio reinterpretation of tracks – although a boot of the RFH gig wouldn't go amiss. The set was slightly different to the one I saw them play at The Empire in 2003 – this time round 'Electricity' and a skittery, stretched out 'Mirror Man' got an airing, but there was still no sign of 'Kandy Korn', darnit! Well you can't have everything, and who can complain when you've got the likes of 'Big Eyed Beans from Venus' to reckon with. This epic-in-four-minutes took up its natural place at the climax of the set, Feelers Rebo playing us out with 'the long lunar note'. Long may it float!

HARLEY RICHARDSON

THE CRACKLING ✪ESTHER✪



Fennesz
Venice
UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH
TO:53 CD (2004)

Observe that the words 'Fennesz' and 'Venice' sound nearly the same and you've hit this album's main concern regarding the fragility of identity, principally European identity. This idea runs through Jon Wozencroft's photography which shows, among other images, shimmering reflections of trees and a building in water, and through the music itself with some tracks registering between filler material or intros to other tracks, and independent pieces in their own right. And if the Aquarius Records website is to be believed, *Venice* itself nearly had no identity: a month before Christian Fennesz was due to hand the album over to Touch, the hard disk drive containing the work crashed and wiped out most of it so he had to reconstruct the album from memory. (A little bird tells me CF often delivers his albums in a state of near-panic and this must be his latest excuse!)

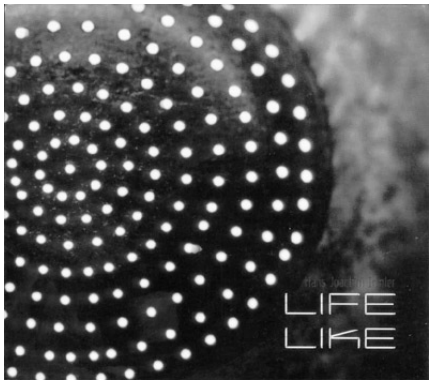
The music is beautiful, even gorgeous in parts and delicately crafted with discreet and subtle touches of laptop scree: in this respect, 'Chateau rouge' shines due to a full-bodied tonal and melodic presence and a seductive atmosphere. The pace overall is slower than on previous Fennesz records and the mood ranges from pensive to foreboding, even touching on fear. The melodies aren't quite as good as they were on 'The Good Man' (from *Field Recordings 1995 - 2002*) or the first track on CF's first album for Touch, but since he has other concerns on *Venice*, this issue is not such a problem. However, the music is not at all edgy or challenging given the weighty message it has to bear and some tracks are too smooth in their production, to the point of being anodyne. Perhaps serious themes and beautiful music don't go well together after all. I still like my Fennesz records to have those little trails of computer noise and fairy dust fluttering in and out of the music and I miss them here on *Venice* where they could have added more depth to an album already brimming with depth, more texture and (yes!) more feeling and emotion.

The single vocal track 'Transit' summarises and makes manifest what the music hints at. On the one hand, Europe is caught between a romanticised, cultured past that birthed the Enlightenment (and a real past of religious wars, serfdom, poverty and popular uprisings crushed by the very political elites who supported the Enlightenment and the intellectuals and artists who advocated the ideas that inspired many such revolts). And on the other, a culturally and intellectually homogenised and oppressed future of corporate fascist police states fighting endless wars in Third World countries to control diminishing reserves of oil, gas and other resources that fuel our mass over-production and over-consumption. David Sylvian,

currently residing in the present Heart of Darkness aka World's Leading Terrorist State aka the USA (at least he lives in the New England area which has a long tradition of liberal democracy) and apparently not overly fond of the country that inspired his old 70s/80s band's name Japan because of its essentially authoritarian society, is an ideal choice to write the lyrics but not necessarily to sing them: his sonorous and all too-physical yet emotionally detached voice is at odds with the music that fades in and out, and the lyrical content itself which, on a level Sylvian may not have intended, suggests that Europe and everything it represents is receding and leaving us behind and the dark future is relentlessly pressing in on us. Some distortion of DS's vocals so that they merge into the music and background noise would have pushed the lyrics' message a lot more and made the song a more cohesive entity.

Not a great album in my view, but the motivation behind it is worthy. As I write, three former colonies of the old Soviet Union (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) plus Malta and a number of ex-Warsaw Pact countries (one with a newly elected extreme right-wing president) are due to join the European Union this week. As Europe is at a crossroads in its history, so I detect CF is also at a crossroads in his career. And recent Touch releases like the *Spire* compilation also point to a crossroads of a sort for that label, caught between trying to instill a political conscience in its audience and a tendency to release records of often fine and lovely-sounding music which, despite the passions and ideas that inspire it, unfortunately teeters on the edges of sonic wallpaper territory.

JENNIFER HOR 27/04/2004
www.touchmusic.org.uk
www.davidsylvian.com (for lyrics to 'Transit')

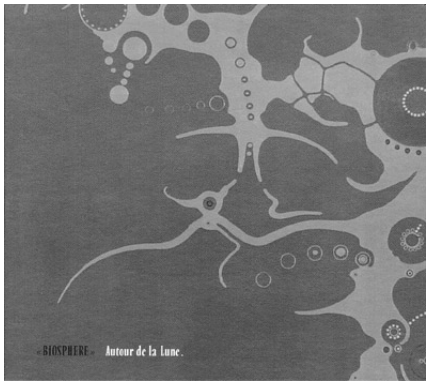


Hans Joachim Irmler
Life Like
GERMANY STAUBGOLD 44 CD (2003)

Irmler – former organ player in Faust – makes good on *Life Like*, a impressive studio construct recorded and realised in his own Klangbad studio. It's simply grand to listen to, and it's that ambitious and confident sound that will provide necessary wow-factor for many ears…it's a deep, deep mix of very heavy sounds, unusual textures, and baffling sound-events, all suspended in a thick and tasty sonic soup. Irmler displays a mastery of the mixing desk easily on a par with fellow 'Krautrock legend' Holger Czukay, but where Czukay's studio sound-paintings showed he was interested mainly in control, logic and narrative, Irmler's imagination is much more irrational – to the extent that he can come over as just plain barmy. The jigsaw-puzzle images on *Life Like* make no sense at all, and his interest lies largely in relinquishing as much technical control as is feasible, the better to reveal and make manifest his private psychic visions, which are more vivid and disturbing thereby.

If I'm right in guessing about this strategy, then it could be that Irmler has succeeded in getting that bit closer to the original spirit of Faust, the deranged and startling qualities that resulted from their singular approach in the studio. Of late, commentators have attempted to account for this by singling out visionary production approach of Uwe Nettelbeck and rescuing the heroic engineer Kurt Graupner from obscurity. Irmler here may not quite replicate the astonishing power of, say, *Faust So Far*, but it's somehow far more convincing than most of the recent reincarnations of Faust since 1992 onwards. The last acceptable record I heard was 1999's *Ravivvando*, and turns out that Irmler played on and was the producer behind that issue – again, forging the music like steel bars in his Klangbad studio. Perhaps it was he who brought same 'deep' qualities to it, that always make me think of some bloated, near-extinct dinosaur before playing said CD. Irmler has also turned in the estimable Faust *Patchwork* CD (STAUBGOLD 37) for same German label in 2002, no doubt emulating what Czukay did for Can on the *Unlimited Edition* cut-up LP. *Patchwork* is an intoxicating listen which maintains excitement start to finish (there are no pauses on CD, as I recall) and if you thought you'd heard everything you could possibly hear in the music of Faust, this footnote to the corpus of work will certainly re-awaken your interest.

Life Like is allegedly a 'fictional aural biography' – so states sleeve note by sycophantic friend of Irmler who clearly believes everything he's told. Created for the most part out of 'modified organs' – seems Irmler is still tinkering with instruments to this day – and cut-ups of foreign elements, the piece started life as soundtracks to be integrated with a museum installation on the theme of Roman soldiers (hence presumably track 6, which begins with sounds of marching men chanting). The tapes were hauled back to Klangbad studios where Irmler gradually mutated and expanded them into this more personal (and far more abstract) 'life-statement'. Granted, a few narrative elements have survived – leaking out of found tapes, field recordings, and ripped-out-of-context voices making fragmentary statements; and those mysterious, plaintive keyboard melodies (somewhat similar to Brian Eno around time of *Before and After Science*), which adds some plausibility to the 'here's the latest chapter in my autobiography' theory. But for me this CD works best when it forsakes story-telling and seems to teeter on the brink of madness, piling on the unexpected layers of



noise in a crazy, de-produced way, and where even the foundations are unstable – the bass sounds underpinning the structure often shift around like the floor of a crazy-house, constantly shaking and shifting ground. This leaves listener with few options but to surrender to the glorious lunacy. Despite cover art which is not very good, and title which is a bit boring also, this CD is one my personal favourites for 2004!

ED PINSENT 19/09/2004

Biosphere
Autour de la Lune
UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TO:62 CD (2004)

In 1865 the visionary French writer Jules Verne published *De la Terre à la Lune*, a story about a manned space flight to the moon that is shot from a giant cannon in Florida and splashes down in the Pacific Ocean. The name of the aforementioned space vessel in Verne's story: the 'Colombiad'. Rumour also has it that the costs that Verne estimated for his fictional voyage in 1865 are spookily close to those of the Apollo 11 mission of 1969. Has the U.S. government been secretly basing a billion-dollar space program on one of the world's first science fiction novels for the last forty years? And just what does this have to do with Biosphere, a.k.a. Geir Jenssen, coming across a 1960s dramatisation of Verne's story in the vaults of Radio France as part of a commission for Le Festival de Radio France et Montpelier? Or the fact that he has further developed his festival commission into a concept album based on this story? The truth is out there.

Maybe it is because Jenssen hails from Tromsø, quite a way north of the Arctic Circle in Norway that predisposes him to produce grand, sweeping vistas of sound. Whatever it is, in this his fourth album for Touch his aim has been to produce nothing less than a sonic equivalent to the astronaut's journey in Verne's tale. We start, presumably earthbound, before lifting off into the heavens, climbing into the outer reaches of the atmosphere before descending into deep space itself. We spend some quality time here before making the return voyage back to the blue planet, by now very far away. We gradually descend, returning home to a watery splashdown just in time for tea.

As you might expect this journey takes some

time. Clocking in at a bit over 74 minutes, Jenssen certainly doesn't hurry proceedings on this CD, not that he would be capable of hurrying things if he tried. What immediately hits you is the extremely slow pace with which events unfold. This is deep ambient music indeed, the likes of which few people are producing today. Everything seems to happen in a strange sort of slow-motion, some of the changes being almost imperceptible before it is too late, leaving you sometimes wondering just how things came to sound like they are. It is also a truism to say that full enjoyment of the album's subtleties are dependent either on listening to it on headphones, or on owning a set of very good speakers.

It is difficult to hear exactly where Jenssen uses the claimed excerpts from the radio dramatisation, although it is possibly in the earlier tracks that represent the outward journey. This is where he also apparently uses recordings from the MIR space station: the incomprehensible, distorted voices at the start of 'Modifié'. These early tracks feature fragments of melody that creep in and out; that are delayed; that almost trip over themselves. They also introduce classic ambient elements like combined high and low frequency drones. The distinguishing factor here being that the highs are head splitting, and the lows are very, very low indeed.

Nowhere is this more evident than on the album's middle tracks, which represent the journey into the depths of deep space. The CD's high point (or should that be low point?), 'Déviation', is for the most part a low and high frequency drone mixed together. But in Jenssen's able hands these simple frequencies take on complex metaphorical meaning: they do indeed suggest the vastness that must be outer space. It is at once a sense of ominous foreboding and serene calmness, the sort of thing that might make it just perfect for your next session of Zen meditation.

By the time melody creeps in again on 'Disparu' we know that we are on the homeward journey, having perhaps had a glimpse of the ineffable. When we reach the final track 'Tombant', we are indeed falling earthwards once again. The very words 'ambient concept album' should normally be enough to send a shiver down the spine of even the hardiest souls, but thankfully this is certainly not the case here. Jenssen has managed to conjure from the black void itself a real 'there-and-back-again' aural journey. This is obviously because he has had Verne's excellent source material to draw on, but it is also because Jenssen is capable of producing work of real depth (excuse the pun), the likes of which features on this CD.

AARON ROBERTSON
info@touchmusic.org.uk
www.touchmusic.org.uk

Frieder Butzmann
Wunderschone Ruckkoppelungen
GERMANY VINYL-ON-DEMAND VOD 8 VINYL LP (2004)

Early recordings from Butzmann, an electronic musician and saxophonist, produced 1969-1971 in Konstanz Am Bodensee. Glancing at the date range there, my first impression was that this might another LP of 'vintage' early analogue electronic experiments, with superficial resemblance to likes of Delia Derbyshire or Raymond Scott – but this was a mistake. In fact, given Burtzmann's subsequent associations with the more 'industrial' areas of the musical spectrum, it's slightly more accurate to situate these recordings more in line with say, the early work of Conrad Schnitlzer or Cluster. Some of those early pioneers of German electronic music carried forward ideas from their avant-garde artist mentors (in Schnitzler's case, Joseph Beuys), and it's important I think to separate them from the more Kosmische, slushy, dreamy side of electronic music that was woven into the fabric of Krautrock history – eg Klaus Schulze, Tangerine Dream, Ash Ra Tempel.

Actually, above discourse doesn't make a whole lotta sense, as (despite this record being remastered in the Studio for Kosmische Musik) Butzmann only seems to be peripherally associated with Krautrock, if at all. If websites can be believed, he was a former member of the early DAF, and Din A Testbild. He opened his own record shop and started the label Zensor, which released the Throbbing Gristle live album *Funeral In Berlin*, and one of his own works *Vertaunesmann des Volkes*. He settled in Berlin, became a composer and recorded several radio plays. Since he was born in 1954, the pieces on this record seem to be early works executed when he was a teenager. All of this makes Butzmann ripe for rediscovery courtesy of this German label which tends to focus on assorted industrial / noise projects, and accordingly assigns a beautiful psychedelic-ish cover to this release.

To my taste, this isn't a particularly enjoyable record, but it's likely that fans of various Teutonic bands mentioned above will want to investigate, and discover one of the experimental bedrocks to that brand of noise. 'Flötenton' takes a collection of stodgy-sounding indistinct sources (many of which will be very familiar already to students of electronic music that predates this) and arranges them in a dull murky mixture. This one plods along in an exceptionally pedantic fashion, covering each step with leaden feet. Occasional blasts of heavy studio echo do something to relieve the tedium. The first 'Ohne Titel' (ie untitled) piece is a completely pointless loop of white noise, with door-buzzer stabs and creaking sounds added as interpolations. Slightly more worthwhile in that it behaves in a less polite, more unruly way; but still very stodgy.

'Sprechfunk mit Ursula' is better. It might be a document of a weird Ham Radio conversation, with noisy interventions; or he might have done it through cut-ups. Either way the tape has been varied in some way and it has more of the 'loopiness' factor that we enjoy. But this is only a brief respite, as we find on side two, where 'Ludäschers Generator' continues the pedantry. This is mind-numbingly monotonous, tone-generated grey phurping noises, with silly added knob-twiddling effects; extremely heavy-handed work. The second 'Untitled' piece is vaguely Kosmik-styled outer-space music, plenty of whines and echoes, which would be promising if it weren't so familiar-sounding, to the point of cliché.

Genuinely sorry not to have enjoyed this great-looking record, whose contents I find lack imagination, ideas, subtlety and skill. The works are half-formed and shapeless, and what little content there is has been massively overstated; it's like reading a letter where every passage has been written three times, and underlined in red. If you can read German, let me know what the sleeve note says, and then try tuning into Butzmann's website (also in German) for further information.

ED PINSENT 30/10/2004
www.vinyl-on-demand.com
www.friederbutzmann.de

Rishaug Marhaug
Feel free at home
SPAIN LUCKY KITCHEN LK 024 CD (2003)

This is the first Lucky Kitchen release for these two Norwegian greats, Alexander Rishaug and Lasse Marhaug, with an interesting 'wanderlust' and travelogue theme to the sound/music. The cover features a collage resembling a Surrealist map of the world; selected continents from an atlas have been sampled and rearranged to form unusual tectonic shapes with certain significant areas marked in half-tone. I take this, along with the title, to mean that the duo don't really 'feel free' any place in the world, and nowhere is home to them. Consequently, it's plausible enough to read this short release as the

document of an odyssey of the lost wanderings of these two orphans, filled with emotions of sadness, displacement and alienation. The titles 'Hide and Seek' and 'Season Motel' confirm fleeting images of a restless traveller, searching in forlorn manner for who knows what. The sad, slow music is filled with wistfulness, an aching longing for fulfilment.

The travelling theme continues on the rambling sleeve note contributed by Rishaug, in which he depicts the tedium of the life led by a digital musician in today's world – it involves no end of travelling, discussion of ideas and projects, handing minidiscs over to collaborators, arranging for remixes…their old friend Ronnie Sundin was brought in to produce the whole record. He didn't manage to do the whole thing, as it turned out. But the one track he did produce, 'Miop', is perhaps one of the most mysterious, and has the characteristic illogicality of a Sundin arrangement. Plus it states the 'alienation' theme with uncanny precision, making it a centre-piece track.

Certainly this release exhibits the more restrained and slightly introverted side of these Norwegian players, and might be usefully filed alongside the ultra low-key Pancakes CD by Jazzkammer from last year (that one was Marhaug with John Hegre, although I think Rishaug may have assisted somewhere). Feel Free at Home doesn't eschew noisy elements completely, but it's mostly a reflective meandering across the continents, using digital methods, processing, odd and eccentric mixes, layers of sonic events…most appealing.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2004
www.luckykitchen.com

ARM
Open Reminder
NORWAY MELEKTRONIKK MELK008 CD (2004)

Here's a good collection from this Norwegian trio of electronica experimenters. They first came our way as one part of a four-way split CD on the Jazzkammer label. Arne Borgan, Are Mokkelbost and Alexander Rishaug are their names, and pretty much what they do is prepare extensive cut-up and edited versions of live performances. They improvise, then edit and re-assemble…extensively. Only by this process of rebuilding can they surprise themselves with fresh combinations and new sounds. This is quite a different approach to insisting on the absolute validity and entirety of every note of every performance that you play; the selective approach means that listener is guaranteed to get only choicest nuggets of sound pleasure.

In their manic re-ordering of these gobbets of noise, electronics, guitar playing and other materials, ARM can come up with some quite startling juxtapositions, and generally maintain a working balance between order and chaos, resulting in an exciting tension. Their method works best when there's slightly too much for ears to cope with – three or four unrelated musical phrases, all overlapping like spinning saucers and causing sparks to fly. And although nothing here has quite the same urgency or attack as those earlier examples, this disc will still give ears and brain a good massage-type workout.

The trio are joined by fellow Nordic men – John Hegre contributes guitar on 2 cuts, Hakon Kornstad likewise with woodwinds. Lasse Marhaug is not physically present, but his personal endorsement of this racket is evident throughout. Even the cover art is fairly nutty and (for a change in this day and age) communicates nature of music herein. Through silhouettes of identifiable shapes and images, we glimpse other textures, other worlds…a night cityscape is visible through the outline of a dragon, for example. Very sense-swapping, a mild post-modern form of LSD trip for the eyes.

ED PINSENT 25/09/2004
www.melektronikk.com
www.armactivities.com

Asuna
Organ Leaf
SPAIN LUCKY KITCHEN LK 022 CD (2003)

A not-unpleasant collection of four solo compositions by this young Japanese chap. Mixing electronic instrumentation with sparing field recordings, each work comes to us framed within an elaborate title that reads like a haiku of the elements which I presume he uses as source material, of the images he intends to evoke. Take for example 'Citrus trees, wheels paddle, azurite sea, July' and 'Stray rabbit, morning fog, November'; there's a miniaturist beauty contained in those words already and, by George, the music lives up to

the promise. It all fits perfectly with the Lucky Kitchen aesthetic of gentle, friendly, and vaguely sad music. Equally altruistic cover art, printed on textured art paper, presents a curtain drawn back from a large window to reveal surprising objects and shapes floating in the sky.

Asuna achieves his simple effects with looped sounds set in gently-pulsing rhythms, and an ever-changing 'earscape' passing by the listener as we drift down the river in a little canoe or canal barge. Despite the obvious electronic processing, the music continues to retain a sense of being very organic; the 'stray rabbit' piece in particular reveals an original mind at work, with its wonderful fresh feeling of having been spontaneously assembled from a few basic elements, and its 'sentence structure' which is very hard to follow, all resulting in rewarding surprises at every turn.

The artist gradually reveals himself to be equal parts a nature-lover and a man haunted by nostalgic memories. On 'Strawberry circuit, childhood, sister, seasons letter, October', he uses recordings of children's voices in mosaic-fashion, to suggest the shards of his own memory of childhood rattling about inside his brain. This is followed by a striking moment of epiphany, as he mentally re-enters his own 'golden age' and submerges himself in a rich, dreamy chord. This is a highly effective combination of field recordings and electronic music, an example filled with content and not merely effect, and it successfully conveys something of the sense of childhood and nostalgic memories for same.

The final short track features harmonium and bells in a pleasing effect, bringing this modest CD to a close; there may not be much here to challenge a demanding listener, but who can resist such charming inventiveness and gentleness?

ED PINSENT 18/09/2004
www.luckykitchen.com

Billy?
Calego
JAPAN TEST TONE MUSIC TTM-006 CD (2003)

The first time you touch down in Japan has to be a strange experience for most coming from the West. It is hard to shake the immediate sense of 'otherness', of being in a place that is quite literally alien to a European aesthetic. The first (and only) time I stopped in Osaka I had just that sort of feeling. My fondest

memory of an all-too short stop was of the toilet in my hotel room, that came with a digital control panel for adjusting such features as the inbuilt seat warmer and the bidet water spray complete with 'men's' and 'woman's' settings (really!).

Maybe I would have been much better off if I had of hooked up with Kazuya Ishigami and his fellow band of noise gypsies, Billy?. Or, maybe I would have been even more confused than I already was. Such is the nature of the strange beast of sound that they have managed to weld together here. *Calego* is the somewhat bemusing title of this CD, the group's fourth outing. In a vain attempt at being able to expound meaningfully on the significance of the title I scoured Google, only for it to come back with a long list of Polish websites. When I was finally able to track down a Polish-English dictionary that included the term, it was revealed as meaning 'inches'.

As self-confessed 'expressionist of analog-noise brutality' and main Billy?-man Yukinori Kikuchi puts it, 'Our ordinary life is built up of nothing but intermittent and fragmentary labour. Billy? exposes such a reality.' These are some heavy-duty thoughts indeed from a group that combines computer noise trickery with audio collage cut-ups. Unfortunately one can only imagine an alternate reality in which Karl Marx was successfully able to convey his social vision to rapidly industrialising nations with the aid of Billy? as his all-star backing band.

Much of the music on this CD seems to audibly embody the spirit of Kikuchi's statement. It is full of grinding rhythms that readily bring to mind the operation of some giant machine: pistons pump up and down; valves are turned; levers are thrown; steam escapes and whistles blow. This is not to suggest that Billy? produce some form of unremitting, industrial sludge. In fact just when you get comfortable with this, they wrench you away into some ethereal landscape where mud-pools boil and a heavy, purple haze hangs in the atmosphere. Their ability to induce such pictures in the mind should be required listening for any budding Powerbook boffin.

It is in Billy?'s deliberate randomness, their willingness to throw you completely off track at a moments notice that they really distinguish themselves from the pack. It is not for the likes of Billy? to grasp vainly for grand narratives of sound. Kikuchi wonderfully sums up the ethos of Billy?'s music as being, 'to avoid consummation, to keep disconnected', a statement that could have come straight from the pages of the Sung dynasty collection of Zen koans, the Hekiganroku. In the midst of the surrounding chaos that is the modern world Billy? sit serenely, knowing as they do the fragmentary and ephemeral nature of reality. Their generous invitation with this CD is for us to join them there.

One day, with luck, somebody will be tempted to make a film based on this CD. Of course it could hardly be anything else but an animated Manga flick set in some indeterminate post-apocalyptical future. I humbly offer a brief plot synopsis as follows. What is left of civilisation has moved underground, the only place left to go when you have almost destroyed everything else. The main protagonist is one of the many robots that exist to carry out the day-to day running of a society past caring. Our robot works his way up slowly, from the deepest levels where he is engaged in the most menial tasks, through the various levels of production, finally emerging onto the scarred surface of the world that he never dreamed existed. Along the way he has many adventures and dangerous encounters. He also discovers that even he, a mere robot, has a soul. He ends his days, enlightened, amongst the outcast remnants of humanity considered too dangerous or too far-gone to be a part of the new world order.

AARON ROBERTSON
C/o Kazuya Ishigami, 1-19-2, SunjiYata, HigashiSumiyoshi, Osaka, 546-0022, Japan
billy@billy-music.com
www.billy-music.com

Ilios
Encyclopedia-RW
GREECE ANTIFROST AFRO2024 CD (2004)

All the way back in 1993, when your internet was still the domain of university computer boffins and a Mac G4 was just a twinkle in some Apple engineer's eye, Ilios, hailing from the venerable land of Greece, recorded an album of material called *Encyclopedia*. Eschewing all traditional methods of sound production, he opted for some more contemporary hardware. Years passed under the Mediterranean sun; Ilios was content to wait for the omens to be right before releasing this material. In the meantime he was happy enough to pass the time eating olives, drinking wine, and generally making merry. In 1997 this material finally was released as the debut CD on the Antifrost label.

Fast forward to the present day, and to celebrate Antifrost's twentieth release that very first CD gets reworked by friends and acquaintances that Ilios has no doubt picked up along the sonic highway during his journey: fellow travellers of sound, bound together by some secret pact of file sharing and RAM upgrades. Some of the usual suspects have been lined up for this project, something of a Who's Who of electro-extremism. Indeed, representatives of both ends of the spectrum have found their way onto this CD, and obviously struck by all of this caring and sharing, Ilios has decided to get in on the act and rework some of his own material from the original album.

Just exactly what the nature of the original *Encyclopedia* was I can't say; I've never heard it, and on the evidence produced by this motley crew, I'm in no particular hurry to go and track it down. It strikes me that it must have been a very fragmentary affair going by the track titles presented on this reworked version, many of which remind me of international airport codes. It's a surprise that there aren't tracks that go by the names 'LHR' or 'LAX' lurking in here somewhere. This 'reworked' version of the original shapes up as a confrontation between the loud and angry brigade, and your quiet sensitive types, some of the best tracks falling somewhere in between.

Back in my own music making days, we used to play crazy things called 'guitars' and 'drums'. Everybody knew the way to play a rockin' gig was to have the loud and fast ones at the start and the end, with all the quiet, slow ones in the middle. There might be a guitar in sight and it might have pretensions to exclusivity, but that is pretty much how this CD runs as well: loud and angry, quiet and minimalist, then loud and angry again. So times haven't changed that much at all really, despite what some folks might say.

Coming out of the loud and angry corner are Jazzkammer, Mattin, Leif Elggren, Daniel Menche, and Zbigniew Karkowski. Most of these are of a type, the truth be told. Menche is just downright annoying (although maybe that's the point), Karkowski gets off the best such track by at least maintaining a sense of humour and not taking the whole thing too seriously. Chipping in for the quiet sensitive types are Fancisco López, Xabier Erkizia, Ilios himself, Jason Kahn and Marc Behrens. López does a good job of sounding like López, Behrens does a good job of sounding like Behrens…you get the picture.

Taking Karkowski's lead, the best tracks here retain a sense of humour and of humanity. Alexei Borisov is one of the few that sounds like he's actually having fun, as does his N & B Research Digest pal Anton Nikillä. His recording of a 1980s Moscow department store juxtaposed with some cheesy period pop is the standout track for me. Other points of interest are Coti K's popping minimalism that sounds surprisingly groovy, and Nishide Takehiro's demented melody that sounds like an update of 'Dueling Banjos'. As for the rest I could leave it out on a Spartan hillside any day.

AARON ROBERTSON
isocool@antifrost.gr
www.antifrost.gr

Irr. App. (Ext.)
Dust Pincher Appliances
USA CROUTON CROU021 CD (2004)

Every once in a while your dedicated reviewer

comes across an album so inscrutable that it appears almost impossible to crack, a CD that is hermetically sealed against any prospect of rational analysis. This is one such album, by (itself quite an inscrutable moniker) Irr. App. (Ext.): better known in this work-a-day world of ours as Matt Waldron. The quick-witted amongst you may recognise that name as being the co-creator, along with Steven Stapleton, of the recent Nurse With Wound album *Chance Meeting of a Defective Tape Machine and Migraine*, in fact a 'remix' of the good Nurse's debut.

So already that seal has begun to break, for it is indeed into the territory normally traversed by the likes of NWW, Current 93 and Coil that this CD heads. To complete Waldron's connections with this unholy trinity, as well as the NWW remix he has also apparently worked with Coil, and David Tibet gets a mention in the credits of this album. All this is to say that in spite of the label's claims for the music here being Dadaist compositions, they are in fact much closer to Surrealist endeavours (know your movements in modern art history!), dark aural dreamscapes from which it is difficult to escape.

In the face of such an outwardly indecipherable release all talk of individual tracks breaks down hopelessly. This album in particular seems to be more than the sum of its constituent parts. Waldron is also noted for his writing and graphic talents as much as his compositional abilities, and all of these elements are on display here. Not content with merely composing a CD's worth of odes to Satan himself, Waldron, Renaissance man that he is has also produced the cover artwork and the text that lines the inside of the albums cardboard sleeve.

We are left guessing as to just what exactly the 'dust pincher appliances' of the albums title are, although the small demonic creatures on the aforementioned cover are presumably engaged in illustrating their use. Throughout we are given brief glimpses into the dark scheme of things: in the artwork; in the music; and in the text notes, which especially seem to defy any rational attempt at understanding. Yet despite these glimpses nothing is fully revealed for what it really is, and that only leaves us to try and read between the lines, our imagination working overtime all the way.

Waldron seems to have constructed a world with its own inner logic, one that doesn't make complete sense in this one. It is here that the Surrealist link comes in: everything has a vaguely dreamlike quality to it, like the aural equivalents to some lost Dalí painting (ignoring for the moment that Dalí was thrown out of the movement early on by Breton for being a foppish mummy's boy and commercial sell-out). It is perhaps not a coincidence that a 'music box' theme appears twice on the album, out of a total of seven tracks. On the face of it the melody contained within such a device is sweet and innocent, yet behind that mask of innocence lurks the threat of unspeakable horror.

The first four of the album's tracks were previously released on cold, Icelandic 10" vinyl way back in 1998, the last three tracks here being recorded at the same time for a follow-up that never materialized. This seems to be a familiar story for Waldron who appears to have completed a full eight albums worth of material since 1991, hardly any of which has seen the light of day due to a series of mysterious events. Now it appears that the oracles have been consulted and the omens are good; the planets are properly aligned and Waldron will hopefully be able to take his rightful place in the pagan pantheon of sound. Arise ye Matt Waldron, lord of nightmarish aural chaos!

AARON ROBERTSON
P.O. Box 070352, Milwaukee, WI 53207, U.S.A.
crouton@croutonmusic.com
www.croutonmusic.com
www.holocenesound.com

Irr. App. (Ext.)
Ozeanische Gefühle
USA THE HELEN SCARSDALE AGENCY HMS 002 CD (2004)

Few reversals in musical fortune seem to be as dramatic as that of Matt Waldron, who for many years has laboured in the sonic wilderness, alone with his demons and a bunch of recorded material that for one reason or another has failed to see the cold light of day. The last few years however have seen his star on the rise, and he seems to be in a hurry to make up for lost time. First there was the 'collaboration' with Steven Stapleton on the recent Nurse With Wound album *Chance Meeting of a Defective Tape Machine and Migraine*, and now two albums out in 2004 released under his own peculiar nom de plume (the other, *Dust Pincher Appliances*, also reviewed above).

Ozeanische Gefühle, translates from the German as 'Oceanic Feelings', a term originally coined by Freud although Waldron happened upon it whilst studying the slightly bizarre work of Freud's former student Wilhelm Reich. Reich used the term to describe the natural state of every organism as connected to the world around it, no doubt in connection with his claim to have discovered a formerly unknown energy that exists in all living matter that he dubbed 'orgone'. After his move from Austria to the land of the free in 1939 Reich was generally ridiculed by the establishment, and in 1954 the F.D.A. placed a ban on his work, ordering all his literature to be destroyed. This was followed by a prison sentence during which Reich died in 1957.

For this CD Waldron uses Reich's ideas as a starting point for further investigation, or to be exact for a 'metonymic exercise seeking to discover that which is near a signifier.' All of which beats the hell out of me, but what I do know is that Waldron has produced an album's worth of material from just two droning soundscapes. The first, that provides the CD's title, clocks in at around 42 minutes long and is some mighty heavy listening. It also tends to render the second ('The Demiurges Presumption', a mere 15 minutes by comparison) possibly a little redundant but that is a small complaint in the scheme of things.

There is a definite surrealist quality in both of Waldron's albums that I've heard to date. Although he claims not to be influenced by surrealism as a movement, I can't imagine where else one comes across the working methodology of juxtaposing apparently unrelated fragments with one another, something that seems quite central to Waldron's style. Whereas on *Dust Pincher Appliances* this results in an album of short individual pieces that all seem to contribute to a bigger picture, here everything seems to be thrown into the blender at once to produce one large, thick sonic ooze which seems in keeping with the album's title.

The range of Waldron's source material seems astounding, but is ultimately cloaked in mystery. There are recognizable elements along the way, among which string and wind instruments feature prominently, but most of the sounds remain at least partially obscured, subordinated beneath the overall heavy droning 'sea-of-sound' effect. As with Waldron's other extant efforts, this album also seems infused with a level of intelligence that is rare amongst his contemporaries. Real thought seems to be the guiding hand that controls everything here, at no stage of the game does anything seem extraneous to Waldron's greater plan.

The influence that Waldron claims above all is the natural world, which may seem particularly apt for an album such as this. Reich is apparently one of the people he finds

this natural world embodied in, along with Kurt Schwitters, NWW man Steven Stapleton and (a little oddly me thinks) former King Crimson axe-meister Robert Fripp. To continue his already astounding emergence from obscurity he has a planned collaboration with Stapleton in the pipeline, along with Jim Haynes from Coelacanth whose work is also released by the small but perfectly formed Helen Scarsdale Agency.

AARON ROBERTSON
helen@helenscarsdale.com
www.helenscarsdale.com

Kotra
Dissilient
UKRAINE NEXSOUND NS 27 CD (2004)

Kotra is a solo act (Dmytro Fedorenko) from Kiev, and he used to play in a noise band called Zet for two years before embarking on his solo career in the digital realms in 1998. Since then he's put out six LPs which seemed to have eluded me, and worked with musicians Andrey Kiritchenko, Kim Cascone and Andreas Berthling. This release, based on 'precise digital noise found sound', is a strong and determined piece, with a startling opening that sets the scene almost immediately – welcome to Planet X! Yes, a palpably alien atmosphere surrounding you and leaving you defenseless against these harsh attacks of loud electronic noise-bursts. Kotra has many distinctive sounds to unleash, and they leave a coppery taste in your mouth…this is a meeting of buzzsaws and large blocks of scrap metal in a cosmic junkyard. Kotra's purposeful assault is sometimes hard to take, but if you can endure, it will loosen the unwanted detritus from the brain…like for example the cerebellum, and left and right hemispheres.

Attentive listener will note (even if only watching CD index points fly past at quite a tilt) that each musical sketch is quite short; one observer reckons that this is a long single piece cut up into fragments, which is a plausible theory. The thoughtful and effective editing creates a gigantic canvas of deathly abstract noise, with each element carefully programmed so as to knock the air clean out of your lungs. Kotra handles 'large' volumes of sound and the tiny pinpoint details of sharp stabbing blips with equal facility; never loses sight of his main aim, which is upkeep of steady assault on the senses. It's quite fierce, but is necessary if we're going to suffer as much as is needed.

Sleeve art for *Dissilient* is a compacted blue, grey and black action painting, whose bold splotches are contrasted with scratchy shapes and arranged in arching layers of utterly meaningless swipes and swoops. This release is on the Ukrainian label Nexsound which brought us The Moglass, a recording likewise filled with adventurous maltreatment of analogue sounds to splendid doomy effect.

ED PINSENT 25/09/2004
http://nexsound.org
http://kotra.org.ua
kotra@ukr.net

Müller_Möslang
Boom_box
GERMANY GROB 649 CD (2004)

On this so-so recording, Swiss player Norbert Möslang (now a refugee from the defunct Voice Crack) teams up with the ubiquitous Swiss improviser, Günter Müller. Good old Norbie has with him with usual cracked everyday electronics, while Günter brings his percussion, iPod and minidiscs to the aural picnic. Maybe I'm just getting acclimatised to it after years of subjecting myself to records like this, but their noise-stroke-music all seems very pleasant and agreeable on this outing, completely lacking in the rough-edged qualities that Voice Crack used to have. But I guess every other civilian runs for cover when they hear even two seconds of this sort of racket. First track 'jogger_jump' might win new converts to our cause; it's almost like 'dubby-trance' music or whatever it is they're calling it now in the nightclubs. An irregular bass pulse tarted up with additional fizzes, mechanical whirrs, digitial clicks, squeals, odd creaks and other eccentric interruptions. Think of a bowl of hot, orange-coloured soup with millions of cheese mites leaping out of it. Further continuous burbling is amply provided by 'freelance_frontier', which resembles a spastic Mongoloid playing Space Invaders inside some monstrous devil's kitchen while trucks pull up outside, bringing fresh deliveries of inedible swill. 'overtime_ozonizer' is even more self-consciously wacky; it sounds like the arrival of a clown car at the circus, complete with comedy horns and a silly little motor putt-putting along. Final cut is 'respire_resume', with a (by now) rather familiar cocktail of slightly restrained and unidentifiable noise elements, such as wonky drum machine patterns, outer-space doodles, fizzing, humming and pulsing. Well, that was all good fun, but as performances these four cuts never really 'let rip', despite the attractive set of ingredients at disposal of the two chefs here. Recorded in one day in Cologne in October 2001; utterly boring photos on the cover courtesy of Frank Dommert.

ED PINSENT 09/10/2004
Goertz Klopotek GbR, Alte Koelner Str 10, D-40699, Erkrath
www.churchofgrob.com

Pink Eye Sore
Shonben
USA LIME STEREO NO NUMBER CD-R (2004)

Quite good, in a witty sort of way…mostly cut-up escapades seemingly formed out of an extensive record library of wonderful oddities; shopping list includes such delights as ethnic pop records, weird jazz LPs, great 1960s bubblegum pop, easy listening sides, and many more. Samples are made – some of them quite extensive, almost the entire record in some cases, which makes a change from the more common micro-second editing approach. The records are then fed through an array of electronic distortion devices, or have added interpolations thrown on top of them. The first track is a doozy and will bring a queasy smile to the lips of many a jaded listener …but ultimately it is a one-joke record which starts to wear thin after five or six variations on it. Pink Eye Sore is Nick Davidson, a UK guy joined on this occasion by Ian Masters (founder of Pale Saints) and is issued on this US label which is a bootleg label linked with TimeStereo (something to do with His Name Is Alive, apparently). Mildly entertaining.

ED PINSENT 11/11/2004
www.limestereo.com

si-cut.db
Offices at Night (Volume 1 – Originals)
IRELAND FÄLLT F.0038.0001 CD (2004)

Si-cut.db is the by now familiarly uncommunicative alias of Douglas Benford, who along with Ben Edwards makes up the duo of Tennis when he's not out doing solo projects like this one. His work generally falls into what is variously labelled Bip-Hop, Glitch, or Intelligent Dance Music depending on what side your bread is buttered. The last has always seemed like a particularly curious description, it's like somebody had to come up with some excuse as to why they forgot to press 'quantize'. I know on the rare occasions that I have been moved to move, the last thing I feel like thinking about is thinking.

Fans of Benford's contributions to Tennis are certain to find much to like here. To his credit

Benford is not one of your completely sterile laptop types. There is more than a touch of good old downbeat and dub here to keep things nice and rocksteady. I'm not sure if it would be at all recognizable to the sound systems, but it does inject a level of 'warmth' (for lack of a better word, and yes I do know that I'm falling back on a cultural trope that has its origins in the industrial revolution thank you) that is lacking in a lot of things like it and that makes for a pleasant change.

The first few tracks I could live without, they seem to drift around a little aimlessly without developing any real desire to move forward. This was never a problem for Satie, as we know, going nowhere has a long and honourable tradition and is not necessarily something to be held against anybody. It's entirely possible that Benford is something of an electronic flâneur. In keeping with the genre Benford has a reduced set of materials that he deploys for maximum effect. It may be the post-modern irony of it all that they sound suspiciously like those produced by the greatest keyboard of all time, the trusty Casiotone.

It is not until track four, 'Application', that things start to get moving. For some reason I can't help envisaging this as music from a French crime thriller set in the streets of Paris, the lonely detective trawling the boulevards at night in his Peugeot past prostitutes and junkies like some later-day Taxi Driver. Of course, much of the music here has this filmic quality to it, which can't help but be intentional. At the same time this is possibly my main criticism: that it quite easily sits in the background and makes no claim to be actively listened to.

This may be the point, after all there's different strokes for different folks. As a pleasant enough background to a Sunday afternoon this is probably just the ticket, but don't expect it to demand you attention. As a rule the tracks become even smokier as the album goes on, by the time we reach the album's title cut we are in positively herbal territory. I'm not sure what sort of offices get this relaxed at night, certainly none that I am aware of. Most seem to retain their harsh skein of fluorescent lighting, which only serves to make them even more uninviting.

This CD is the first volume in three planned for 'Offices at Night'. The other two will exist as albums of remixes in the form of MP3's: the first (Volume 2) by a host of electronic boffins, the second (Volume 3) by Benford himself. Why? That's certainly the question that I would ask. It all has the vaguely unpleasant whiff of self-indulgence, but then I never have understood how you can have pretensions to a minimalist aesthetic whilst smothering the world with an almost Baroque level of output in comparison. One of these days I pray that the good lord above will finally hand down the commandment that Moses forgot to transcribe: less is more.

AARON ROBERTSON
Blessington House, 18 Ballynahinch St, Hillsborough, Co. Down, N. Ireland, BT26 6AW
info@fallt.com
www.fallt.com

Stop
EPO
POLAND SIMPLE LOGIC RECORDS SIMLOG 011 CDR [2004]

A single 15-minute electronica experiment by this crazy electronic Pole…a relentless battering-ram of sound invades your mind, attacking your cerebellum with its unusual textures and ferocious high-end vibrational pitches, all moving very fast indeed. If heard through headphones, the closing passages will induce sensation of having your cranium eaten out by crazed, carnivorous termites. Yipes! Dynamic and intense, *EPO* is a strong and ingeniously constructed workout that should be an object lesson for lazy creators who simply leave their sequencers running on repeat…recommended.

ED PINSENT 24/10/2004
simlog@hot.pl
www.simlog.tk

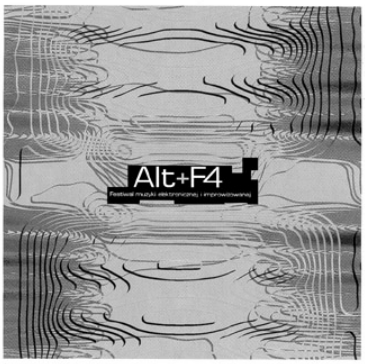
Mikronytes
Live @ Sonic Circuits 2003
USA SCARELIGHT RECORDINGS NO NUMBER 3" CD (2003)

This is, apparently, an 'improvisation remix' of the Crank Automotive album *live_src*, if that means anything to you. For the first five minutes, this mini CD delivers some pretty energetic and random electronic noisy materials, blasting forth over an intriguing bass melody somewhere in the background. Promisingly, the opening chaos gives way to more chaos…restless changing of activity, including lots of echo, industrial grind sludge, trip-hop styled beats in a very mad way. Then it mutates into a section filled with cello samples, becomes a bit lost and lonely in tone after the initial 'party in your mind' mood, and the quality starts to deteriorate rapidly into rather more ordinary digital malarkey. No information on the cover about this lot; very cheap and badly clipped photocopied insert is all we get. Well, it may not be greatness, but at least it's reasonably surprising. Recorded live in Washington DC.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2004
http://scarcelight.com

Various Salvia Festival Types
Alt+F4
POLAND SALVIA CENTER FOR NEW FORMS C44:02-8 CD (2004)

Who says you can't learn a thing reviewing extreme music? Many of you may laugh derisively, but computer naïf that I am, I have just discovered that Alt + F4 are the keystrokes used to close an open window on your screen instead of using the mouse. Something of a revelation to these hands, and it is all thanks to this colourfully packaged CD from Poland. More than just a set of keystrokes, Alt + F4 is also the name of an intermittent festival of electronic and improvised music in the new EU member-state produced by Salvia, an ambitiously-entitled 'centre for new forms'. This is a compilation of the action from the second such festival, held in May 2003 in Warsaw, and it shapes up as an improvisational equivalent to a World Cup playoff.



Austria vs. Poland is the match of the day, this edition of the festival being co-funded by the Austrian Cultural Forum who must have thought themselves hard pressed for culture to have to resort to funding a bunch of strange people that make loud noises with computers. It is to our benefit that they did though, and the results are nicely packaged here. The Austrian team weighs in with some big names like Fennesz and his Mego teammate Pita, but also with the lesser-known Laleloo. The Poles look plucky but a perhaps little light in comparison, they've picked a late ring-in from Japan to bolster the side, Zbigniew Karkowski, who would look good playing in most front lines.

The Poles kick off proceedings with former EA players Viön and Mem, who start with a sneaky bit of wordplay, 'Saliva'. This piece of loud, electric spit sets a fast pace for things to come and is possibly a self-depreciating poke at the fact that these two, a.k.a. Artur Jaworski and Kamil Antosiewicz, are in fact the driving forces behind Salvia. Either that or they have trouble forming words with letters other than S, A, L, V and I. They make inroads into Austrian territory, but it is Fennesz who steps in to steal the sonic ball-of-sound. He settles things down with 'Chateau Rouge', a characteristic piece of guitar-loops and digital distortion.

Mem and Neurobot member, Wolfram, manage to make get things going Poland's way again with some slow ambient, crackling ether that works up a digital feedback flurry before setting up Karkowski to strike. His high piercing whistle that descends into a forceful steam vent is an excerpt from a concert performed at an associate Alt + F4 event called Turning Sounds. If the Austrians are rattled by all of this they don't show it, Pita showing his experience by taking it up straight with another electro space-ride that presses the Polish defences with its digitised precision.

The Poles refuse to lie down though, and they weigh in with some heavy, chiming tones themselves courtesy of Spear. His 'ambient with esoteric elements' proves difficult to tackle and puts most in a hypnotic daze, leaving him free to drift downfield unchallenged. Shaking under the weight of such a sonic dreamscape the Austrians do remarkably well to make a comeback, but comeback they do, and well at that. A last ditch effort is put in by the team's outsiders, Laleloo, who methodically take apart fragments of guitar and synth sound, making a looping play deep into Polish territory. Their labour doesn't go unrewarded, and they come up trumps with their final melodic cries. Extra time and the Poles try some desperate measures, Viön trying to pull something out of nothing with Robert Piotrowicz and Jacek Staniszewski, but it's all a bit messy and the final whistle is blown.

All up it's a game well played, both sides take their chances and each have some missed opportunities. When full time has been played the two sides are neck and neck. The extra time does nothing to change the outcome, the final result a hard-fought draw. It remains to be seen if a rematch will be played, but this event would have given both the Austrians and Poles something to think about. It's an enjoyable enough listen with action coming regularly and nothing being overly long on the ears. This appears to be Salvia's first release, and if their future efforts are up to the same standard I might just learn a few more keyboard tricks.

AARON ROBERTSON
ul. Wyszogrodzka 1/158, 03-337 Warszawa, Poland
salvia@salvia.pl
www.salvia.pl

Knifehandchop
How I left you
UNITED KINGDOM CARGO RECORDS VF009 CD (2004)

If it's a multi-sound record you're looking for, then 23 year-old Billy Pollard's latest mix of hardcore and dancefloor *How I left you* is 11 tracks of pure, good beats. It's a slow starter, really only getting into the music by Track 6 'Outside', but the first few songs make you want to listen on, simply to hear what the rest of the album has to offer. The separation of the songs is at a happy balance, however sometimes it's hard to tell when one song finishes and the next begins. Mostly, the variety of the beat differentiates a song from its predecessor and some are completely different sounds altogether! Strangely a lot of the tracks have similar rhythms to other songs on the market today, but I can definitely relate them to different scenarios. For example, Tracks 5, 'Girlfriend' and 'Policecore' sound like the background music to an action packed video game, with fast paced beats and heavy rhythm, whereas Track 9 'Now with 50% more rave' strikes me as the sort of song to be played at the fairground, with its dizzy melody and haunting sounds. Though the album is good, it has to be said that Track 11 '94 hardcore music' doesn't fit into the CD and its strange compilation finishes the record off oddly. An album that will change your reaction through each song.

LAURA WILSON
info@cargorecords.co.uk

Vitaminsforyou
I'm Sorry For Ever and For Always
CANADA INTR_VERSION RECORDS INTRO10 CD (2003)

Oh Canada, oh Canada, just where did it all go wrong? You're really quite large and imposing, yet you've got a reputation for being just too damn nice; a gentle giant that constantly gets pushed around by your wily southern cousin. You've got lots of hidden potential that somehow seems to go unfulfilled. That's not to mention your inner struggle with the two halves of your post-colonial nature that threatens to tear you apart. If ever there was a nation that was the geographical embodiment of the Chief from 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest', I think you might be it.

Some of you may be wondering what all this musing on a nation's identity has to do with this review. Just plenty I say, just plenty. For much of this national character seems to find itself burnt into the very pits of this CD: the sense of lost opportunity; the feeling that if only things had been a little different; the abiding image of a lonely child being reprimanded by a well-meaning parent with the words 'must try harder'. Now it may be that I have misjudged things altogether, and that in fact this album is a breathtaking pinnacle of achievement such as can only be produced in the Canadian hinterland. Or not.

Vitaminsforyou is the single-handed work of a certain Bryce from Winnipeg, Manitoba. By all accounts there is quite something of a scene in Winnipeg, both for new electronic music and much post-rock malarkey. A few years back Bryce decided to cut his losses however and move to Montreal, Quebec where there is also quite a scene for electronic music, not least of which is of the electro-acoustic variety being produced on labels such as Empreintes Digitales. Not to say that this is Bryce's bag at all, but he is accounted as being representative of the 'Montronica' sound, the label coined to encapsulate a variety of electronic happenings in this city. 'I'm Sorry For Ever And For Always' is his (late or early, depending on where you read it) 2003 debut. Bryce brings together on this CD an array of sound sources, the likes of which seldom have the opportunity to get to know each other very well at all. The three main areas of said sound being glitch-orientated computer grooves; some 'real' instruments like guitar and viola; and a healthy dose of field recording to tie everything together. It's an interesting mix, and it's all handled remarkably well for somebody making their debut record. One thing blends into another seamlessly throughout; small events come and go, passing by almost unnoticed. One thing you certainly couldn't accuse Bryce of is lacking attention to detail. It is ironic then that this is possibly one of the very drawbacks of the album. There is a distinct lack of rough edges to this CD and it is just all a little…well, nice.

Many are the comparisons that are made between our Bryce and a host of luminaries. There is a lot of talk of a certain Mr Malkmus and his band, yet they had more than their own share of rough edges I think. Bryce himself mentions the influence of a local band, Eric's Trip, which fool that I am I thought was just a song off 'Daydream Nation' but there you go. If I had to peg the man to a particular musical mast, I would say in places the music seems sub-Beck, or you could possibly imagine a nerdy version of Badly Drawn Boy with better gear and you wouldn't be far off at all.

Overall you just can't shake the impression that given his materials Bryce could have really rocked, and yet he somehow kind of limps along and that's a shame. There are probably very hip cafes in both Montreal and Winnipeg that are big fans of Bryce's first outing, who will be hoping for more of the same as an ideal accompaniment to the frothy cappuccinos that they serve. I personally imagine Bryce to be one of these overly sensitive boys who you can barely resist walking up to and either shaking very hard or slapping in the face, just to see a bit of colour in their cheeks. Unfortunately it comes as no surprise that there is a 'hidden' track at the end; that this track clocks in at around sixteen minutes; or that nothing actually happens on this track for a full ten minutes. It's just all so quirky don't you think?

AARON ROBERTSON
3644 Boul. St Laurent, P.O. Box 21556, Montreal, Quebec, H2X 3Z1, Canada
info@intr-version.com
www.intr-version.com

Domenico Sciajno and Gert-Jan Prins
The d&b album
ITALY BOWINDO 04 CD (2003)

On this, a relatively lively release for this otherwise quiet and minimal label of electronica, these two chaps turn in a CD that's kind of avant-garde parody of drum and bass / hip-hop instrumental music. 'Cascocity', the opener, is the most obvious example of their cunning ploy; it consists of ugly, arbitrary mis-shapes of digital noise, all farted out with a dance beat of sorts. To back it up, the duo adopt silly names 'Do Shine'o' and 'Prinjan' to

convince us of their avant street cred. 'Vinexology', the closing track, does likewise – further electronic farting and beats, but this time with extended glorgy modulations and static layers that sound like raspberry-blowing. 'Tablerock' is also vaguely exciting, with its minimal disco-styled avant blurping; it has a collection of mean-spirited beass throbs and pulses, not far removed from vintage Suicide, although nowhere near as ragged or spirited. It seems difficult, perhaps impossible, to get a raw and dirty sound out of modern digital equipment, try as they may.

With 'Stonone', as listeners we're back on more familiar electronic turf, which is to say quiet and restrained fizzing and bleeping relayed in patterns whose structure is impossible to grasp. Sciajno and Prins have both made records for Erstwhile, although not working together, which exhibited this same bewildering quality. They do it using computer processing, electronic sources, and radios; some radio fragments manage to leak into 'Vinexology', to reasonably good effect. 'Stonone' builds up an impressive range of sonic variety as it trundles on; again, due to the sheer digitalness of it, it seems to lack substance somewhere. But I do like the precision and brittleness of it; the same qualities are evident on 'Diamonds will do', which drones and throbs with the relentless accuracy of a high-powered laser beam. It will burn your ears away. Recorded May 2002 in a studio in Amsterdam.

ED PINSENT 30/10/2004
www.bowindorecordings.com
www.fringesrecordings.com

Tu m'

Pop Involved (Version 3.0)
IRELAND FALLT F.0034.0002 CD-R (2004)

In 1918 Marcel Duchamp produced what was to be his last painting on canvas, entitled 'Tu m''. It's an inventory of sorts, an ironic look at different modes of pictorial representation illustrated by some of Duchamp's previous work, over which hang the shadowy forms of the readymades. The title of course begs for completion, and in typical Duchampian fashion can be done so in many ways. One might think of tu m'aimes for example, but there are others that probably spring more readily to mind: tu m'agaces, tu m'ennuies, tu m'emmerdes.

Just why two glitch-orientated Italians have chosen to name themselves after a work by one of the twentieth-century's truly monumental artists remains unclear, although much seems to be made of the link between Duchamp's readymades and their own method of working. It appears that structural faults found in pieces of music are the starting points that these two use as a basis for further sonic investigation, which is certainly an interesting strategy and one that Duchamp himself was not adverse to using, although it is perhaps not the 'real innovation in the music of the new millennium' it is presented as being.

This CD sees this duo 'simply investigating the pleasure of melody', an overtly romantic statement, the likes of which you wouldn't normally expect from people with such an operating philosophy and a Mac G4 to boot. It does, unfortunately, turn out to be rather a perverse sort of pleasure to these ears. The melodies that do manage to escape the glitch treatment are in fact short and repetitive (one of Duchamp's pet peeves), so much so that my dusty collection of classic rock now has the singular virtue of sounding positively symphonic by comparison.

The title of the album, to its credit, does indeed turn out to be an apt description of the work contained within, and you begin to sense that the whole microsound endeavour is at its heart a Deconstructionist one. Much like Derrida with the literary bit between his teeth, this is a reading of melody that is extremely close. It literally is so involved that what once possibly were melodies become mere sonic blurs and squiggles of sound. Exactly what pleasure is to be drawn from such a microscopic investigation I confess must remain a mystery to me. All of this being said the boys at least have the sense to keep their prodding and probing within pop-like dimensions, another link perhaps to the CD's title, nothing here runs much over five minutes and is the better for it.

If all of these tracks really do begin with pieces of 'found' audio that contain errors (and I personally doubt that they do), then they can be seen in one sense as belonging to the class of the 'assisted readymade'. I do find something a little disquieting though about invoking the likes of Duchamp (as has been done in other publications of varying levels of repute) when discussing modern electronic music such as is presented here. The main reason for doing so appears to be the supposed shared practice of throwing apparently disparate elements together to produce pieces of insightful genius. All of which seems to ignore the glaring disparity between Duchamp and the concept of bricolage on the one hand, and the many exemplars of electronica which I can only think to describe with the adjective 'designer'.

It is admirable of Fällt, although hardly revolutionary, to produce a burn-to-order series such as the 'Ferric' one of which this CD is the second installment. Leaving aside for a minute the question of just how many CFC's the slightly incongruous DVD-sized super jewel box case took to produce, it does seem a little indicative of the music contained therein that it features 'offset printed artwork' and is burned onto a 'two-colour, silk-screened Diamond AQ CDR' and that the house creative (or creatives) who goes by the single moniker 'Fehler' has produced 'an IBM punch card inspired design'. None of which strikes me as being very Duchamp at all, but all of which strikes me as being very tasteful indeed.

AARON ROBERTSON
Blessington House, 18 Ballynahinch St, Hillsborough, Co. Down, N. Ireland, BT26 6AW
info@fallt.com
www.fallt.com

Aleph

Senniki Norymberskie
POLAND SIMPLE LOGIC RECORDS SIMLOG 012 CD [2004]

Possibly the second solo CD from this obscure genius on Polish label Simlog, whose previous release did occasion many eruptions of frothy praise from this scribe's fervent pen. I heartily enjoy his brand of surreal electro-doom mood music, although I admit the prior CD was slightly stronger and this one has no real stand-out cuts. That said, you can't beat it for sheer evocativeness. The title translates as 'Norymbergyan Diaries of Dream', so you know from the start you're entering a world of sleep-induced hallucinations and nightmare landscapes, all faithfully logged by Aleph in his secret nocturnal diaries, in true H P Lovecraft fashion. 'Wonderful Garden' is a slow downer of monotonous, pallid droning with a depressing over-repeated bass figure…speaking as one who hates to tend to his garden, this music suits my bad-tempered mood exactly. 'From That Side' is more of an epic, seeming to depict nightmarish skeletons clad in black armour and riding on horseback. More gloom and menace is just around the corner. Chilling…Aleph lost in strange reverie as he beholds these supernatural bony creatures…things grow more indistinct as he loses consciousness, overwhelmed by the sight…can such things be? 'Third Plateau' is a stark and romantic glimpse of a twilight world, where the very land itself seems diseased. A black and white etching which seems to change as you stare at it. 'A doll (remote hearing)' is also sinister and dark, eerie growls and clanking lurking in the corner…with further titles like 'Holiest places', 'Invisible Wit' and 'Ten Spheres', I'm sure you're getting the picture by now. Add to which the woodcut on the cover, which I'm fairly confident has been – erm – slightly overused in this context, and we seem to be dealing with a near-Gothic atmospheric set, low on 'events' but very high on 'solemnity'. Just right for next Halloween party. Dreams, ghosts, spirits and astral geometry…a good list of occult and supernatural doings for you.

ED PINSENT 21/10/2004
simlog@hot.pl
ojra26@o2.pl
www.simlog.tk
www.chaember.art.pl/aleph

rsundin

'The Sound starts affecting your Dreams...'

Ronnie Sundin interview

Ronnie Sundin is a Swedish electronic sound artist. He chose the lower-case name rsundin rather than issuing something under his real name. This action may have led to him being invited to contribute some music to the compilation *lower case 2*. He hated the results; felt that the other contributors 'all sounded identical', and determined that the so-called 'lower-case school' have rigid ideas about their music, which he can't understand. It's a label he rejects. Incidentally, it seems Californian Steve Roden coined the term, unwittingly, when describing his own work. rsundin played a short set with Lasse Marhaug at the Sound 323 shop, which as all London knows has a tiny performance venue in the basement. Some 30 or 40 people witnessed the duo build, out of a few very simple elements, a quite convincing 'wall of sound' in layers, using only minidisc players, compact discs, a mixing desk and contact mics. Their activity was, of course, minimal.

Date of interview: 15 May 2004
Location: Pizza Parlour on Archway Road
EP = Ed Pinsent, RS = Ronnie Sundin, LM – Lasse Marhaug

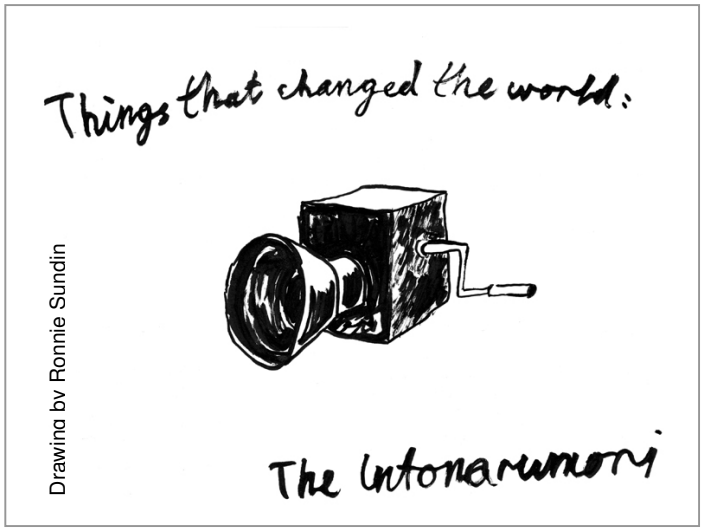
EP My first question is a big question...your music right now is very very quiet, but there's an awful lot going on. There's great depth to it, and I don't think I'll ever get to the bottom of it. I wonder if you could say anything about that?

RS Yes, it's a long story. All of my musical interests are in what I do...what I do is always a reflection of what I'm playing back home on my CD player. Five years ago, when I was making more noisy stuff as Bad Kharma, I was more into Japanese noise and stuff like that. Then I got to the point when I felt like there's nothing to do any more. I've done what I want to do with that, and I want to change it. So I decided to go in the other direction and turn down the volume. I didn't want to be minimal. I wanted it to be like a monochrome painting. When you see it at a distance it looks just flat, but when you go up close to it, you see a lot of detail. I guess I wanted to do something similar in my music. I wanted to slowly draw the listener to it and make them start looking closer, at the things that were going on. At the moment I feel like I've done my share of quiet music for a while though. My CD on Antifrost is probably the last one in the more restrained approach, not that things are going to get really loud again but I feel I've done just about as much as I can within that field. I never got around to do that super quiet album that I wanted to do some years back and right now it simply doesn't feel interesting for me anymore to do that.

EP How many records did you do as Bad Kharma?

RS There were nine albums or so, on CD-R. They're very obscure. It's only a solo act. When I started Bad Kharma, the first CD was actually meant to be a sort of backwards retrospective, like a compilation. I started with a compilation, in fits and starts. And after that I was supposed to go more in depth into [each] of those areas. Then, for some reason, I decided to drop the name. So, noise was one direction I wanted to do, but I also wanted to do more quiet stuff. And all of that was on the first Bad Kharma CD.

EP Why did you get frustrated with Bad Kharma?



RS It had just got to the point where I felt that I had done everything that could be done. I felt there's no point in going on. One of the reasons why the project was terminated was that it became considered a noise project pretty early on and my intentions with it was a bit more open ended than that, it didn't want to limit it to a certain genre. One aspect of the noise scene that attracted me initially though was that there was no star system and everyone was collaborating with each other but I also discovered that it at the same time was strangely conservative. I remember reading a review of a cassette that Lasse had released around Christmas, in a Finnish noise zine where the reviewer complained that the cover was made up from Christmas cards...instead of the traditional xeroxed pictures of corpses or bondage on it!

EP How did you make the Bad Kharma noise?

RS I had this great mixer, a Boss mixer, which you could do really great overdrive stuff on. So I was playing around with contact microphones and overdriving [the sound] in the mixer. That was a big part of the sound. Loud and distorted, yes. And you have the gain on top of the mixer, and it distorts. I always started with improvisations, straight to DAT, then edit [them] afterwards. Guess I've always been really picky about the composition. But back in those days, I was working really fast and spontaneously. I was working with a portable DAT recorder. I was editing on the DAT. I was rewinding the tape, listening to it, finding sections that I wanted to change. So I added some new sounds there, and there, and there... listen to it and correct things that were boring. This is before I had computer [software.]

LM It's funny how when you get older you spend so much more time editing. The whole post-production thing. I want to get back to doing stuff quickly! Quick and dirty! Because I don't think the music is necessarily getting any better with me taking so much time [over it].

RS I've always been picky with details, but I kind of miss that period when I was doing things more spontaneously. When I was young I was full of enthusiasm for things, learning how they work. One you get the hang of them, now I have more high ambitions and it's harder to...

EP How would you describe your high ambitions? Do you see yourself as a composer?

RS I want to get better at it all the time. Surprise [the audience]...I want to surprise myself, too, I guess.

EP What do you start a piece with? A field recording?

RS It's different [every time]. Sometimes I can just sit with a sound and just process it in some software. Try to see where it takes me. A few times, it takes me in an unexpected direction. Sometimes I can just spend a lot of time processing sounds, forever! But you're getting nowhere! Then all of a sudden you take another sound, and you know, you have a twenty-minute piece, like that! So it differs from time to time. I guess that is what happened with the *Standards* CD. That's very short snippets of sound, I didn't know what to do with them. Leftovers! And I just put them all together into one piece.

LM Brilliant title, *Standards*! For me, knowing Ronnie's work, constantly he lives by standards!

EP Another thing I've found with your music is it seems very hermetic, sealed-off. And also very surreal, and dream-like. I like both of those things. The more you get into the work, the more you feel it is enclosing you. And also that it's telling a very strange story.

RS Yes...especially *Sleepwalk*. It's kind of trying to tell a story there, but I don't know what it is. I've always been inspired by dreams. Especially this state in between awake and dreaming. You start hearing sounds, but you're still asleep. And the sound starts affecting your dreams. And you're not quite sure if you're dreaming or hearing things. Also, like you're taking a nap in the afternoon or something and you're slightly dozing off, you're not quite sure if you're dreaming or still awake. That's great. I'm more interested by it, but I don't know if I'm trying to recreate it.

EP What about this record on Hapna, the *Morphei* one...that sounds likes Morpheus, another sleep-related title?

RS Yes, that's the Swedish name for Morpheus.

EP There's a very curious chart reproduced in the inner sleeve. I love this chart! What does it mean?

RS It's a semi-abstract portrait of the piece. It's a bit improvised, not as precise as a graphic score. I guess *Morphei* is the most known of my CDs, the most widespread. Hapna have got proper distribution. This one, *Sleepwalk*, was my first one. That was mainly when I was still at the Art Academy. I put it out myself. I started my own label. Bonbon records, that's me. But I never had money to promote the records, I had barely enough money to press the CDs.

EP So what's your background in visual art?

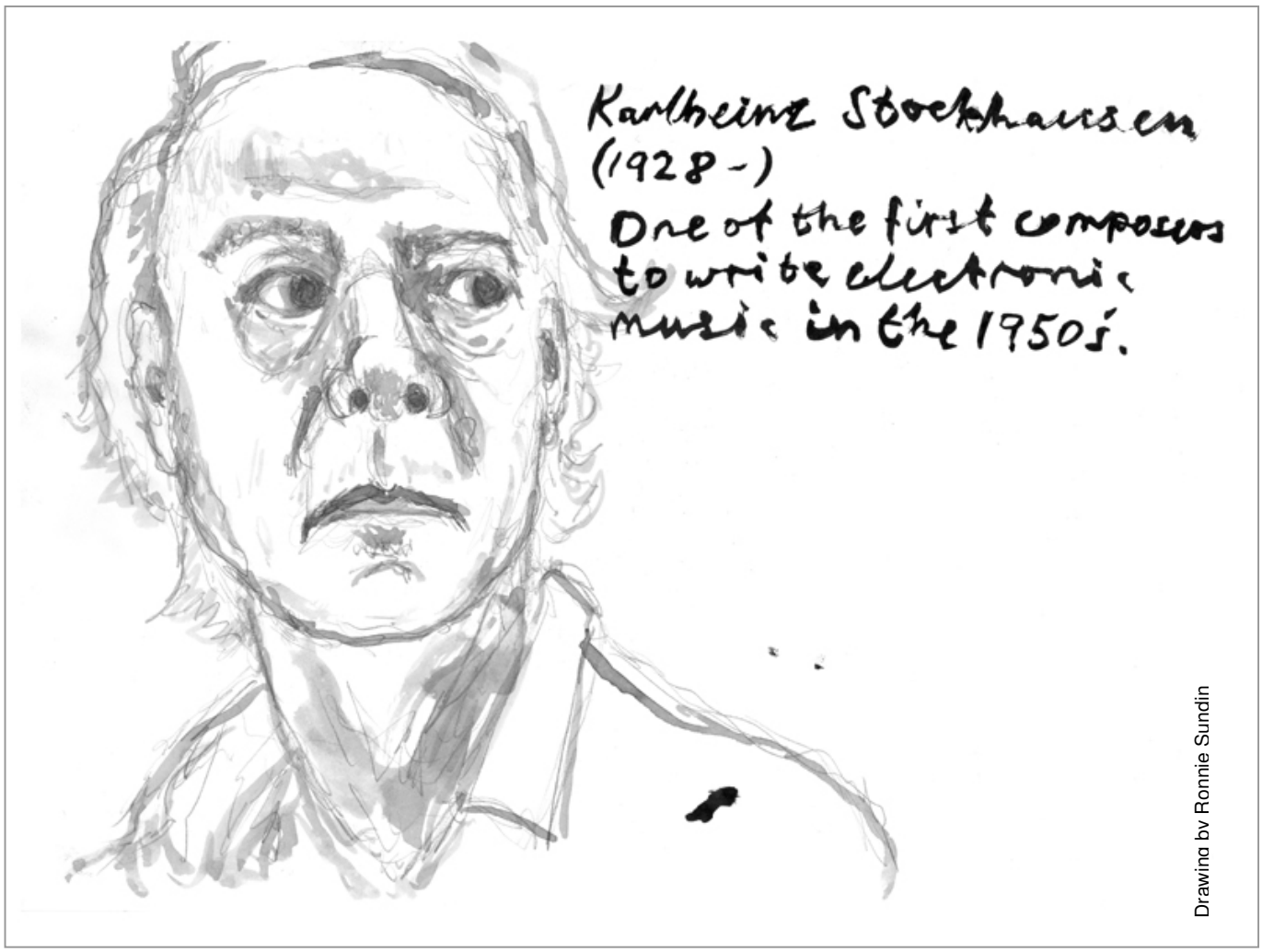
RS I started drawing as a kid, like other people. In my teens I started making cartoons. Then I started art school when I was 18. Continued at the art academy in the north of Sweden. I started getting problems with my visual work, because then you had to have some sort of a concept, an idea behind the visions. I couldn't deal with that. I feel that many art academies are more or less slaves under current trends within contemporary art which dictates what kind of art students 'ought' to do, rather than to look at what they are interested in as individuals.

So I stopped making visual art, and fell into making sounds, making music. I felt more comfortable with that. Then again, sound art became very trendy towards the end of the '90s so after I graduated a lot more people are working with sound at my old academy nowadays. Leif Elggren and Carl Michael von Hausswolff were role models for me since they are pioneers in this field of having a career both as composers and visual artists.

I'm slowly working my way back to visual things now. I've started working on a comic, two years ago, about myself. It's about people I have met, my family, my cousins...I've only made the first chapter. The second one is going to be about my first visit to Trondheim. The style I'm doing right now is autobiography. Some of it's about the experimental music scene. It's interesting...to a limited audience!

EP Now, you say you're doing a gallery show of drawings of some musicians, including Rune Lindblad, Lasse Marhaug, and other people you know. Has that happened yet?

RS No, it happened a couple of weeks ago at a small gallery where I live. It's about 50 drawings, based on photographs. Mostly portraits of composers, but also portraits of some records and some instruments, more or less a history of music. It was sort of a commission. Not the idea, but I have a friend who has access to this room where the exhibition



Drawing by Ronnie Sundin

was, and he wanted me to do something there. So he told to make an exhibition there...in four weeks! Sometimes you really need a deadline like that to do it. I'd been thinking about the idea for ages, but I'd never gotten around to doing it. I'd like to do a book, that would be great.

EP Has it always been a struggle for you to get your work noticed, or generate interest?

RS No. It's just I don't try very hard. And I've always been too hard on myself.

EP Why, because you don't release everything you produce?

RS No, I'm just too self-critical, perhaps.

LM I like everything I do!

RS He's quite the opposite!

LM Seriously: as an artist, you always feel that your past work is not up to your standards now. There's always this difference between what you think about the work and what other people think. So you put out a record and you're not happy with it afterwards, but if other people are happy with it, then it has a purpose, it has a value. And you need to see that value. Don't under-estimate the audience! The experience of the audience!

EP That's very good. There are a lot of artists who act as though they would like to disown their past. In some cases, trample all over it. I'm thinking of recent projects by The Residents...

LM It's always horrible when artists go back to rewrite their own history.

RS This is a classic problem I guess. I had a few formative years during the late '90s where I felt that I was developing at a speed that I couldn't stand things that I had produced only a year earlier, which can be especially frustrating when you have to work with labels that can sometimes take up to a year or more to release things. Take *Sleepwalk* for instance - when I was approached by Eric at Ground Fault to put out a CD on his label I sent him some material that he liked, but then there was some misunderstanding regarding the cover design so the whole thing got delayed a whole year. By that time I wasn't interested in having the material I had sent him released anymore so I sent him a completely new album which I was more happy with. and he agreed that the new material was far superior and should be released instead.

The same thing happened with my CD on Fallt in their 'invalidObject' series - it was a massive project for them so it took them over a year to gather funds for it but I didn't like my initial contribution anymore so I sent them new material just one week before they were going to send everything off to the pressing plant - but again, it turned out to the better.... I don't have as much of a problem with that nowadays though since I feel that most things I've made since 2001 still sounds kind of OK! I feel I got a bit carried away when I did the *Lorez Plaza / Limp* double album back in '99, at least when it comes to the *Limp* CD which feels like a lame attempt to connect with the whole glitch scene at the time. I don't totally dislike it though. Only a few tracks.

EP So...this is a wild guess now, but it seems that there's a kind of 'open structure' you have in your head as to what's going to fit in the work. Could this tie in with your experience at art school, when they told you there has to be a conceptual structure, and you reacted against that. A nebulous, open-ended structure? You know, as the artist, what's going to fit, but it's not obvious to anyone else.

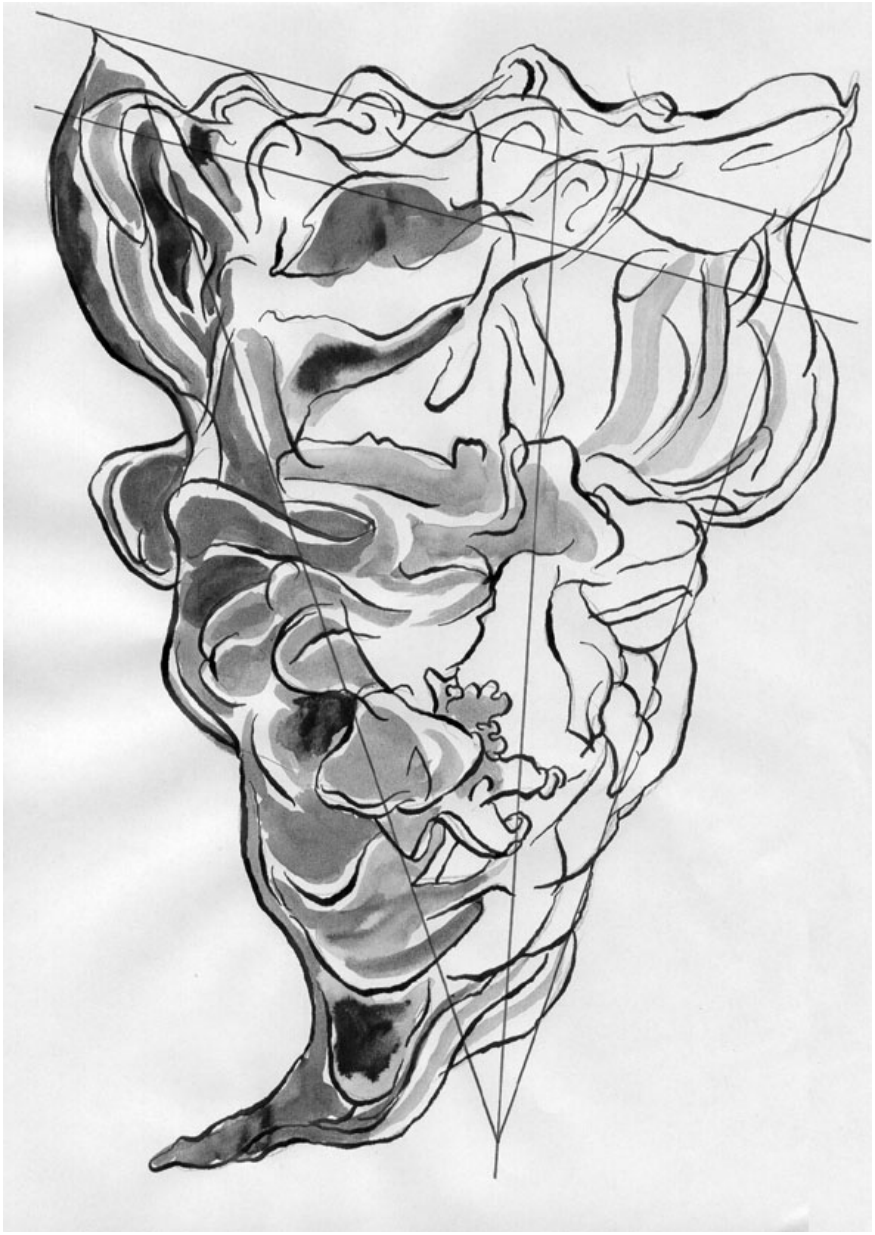
RS I guess there's sometimes two parts to it. One part is I'm working with sounds, looking for something that sounds interesting. The other part is to work with a composition. That also makes it extra-interesting. It's easy to make something that sounds good. It's hard to make something that surprises me, or is interesting in other aspects. So sometimes, once I'm connected with a piece by itself, it's very easy. Sometimes it's the other way around. Work on it forever. *Sleepwalk* took me a whole year to finish. A year from start to finish. I was living in Trondheim at the time and I spent three months in the studio there. I only produced ten minutes of material. I also had a problem with the software because I knew what I wanted to do. In ProTools you can just redo it a thousand times. I have to listen to the pieces I do so many times before I decide when it's finished and it can be released. Then afterwards, I just can't stand it any more! Can't listen to it any more! I know when it's finished, I guess, when you feel there is nothing you can do to make it better.

I've always had a pretty intuitive approach to what I do. Sometimes I don't realise what things mean until afterwards. I had problems with this when I did *internalreference* because it had a fixed concept already from the start so by the time I had collected the material for it I had also made a presentation of the idea at the art academy and completely lost interest in finishing it, so it took me a whole year to get around to do that. This is also something I'm wrestling with at the moment since I've just started sketching on a project that deals with Swedish alchemists and mystics in the 1800s... □

Since this interview took place, Ronnie has now been approached with an offer to make a book from the drawings in that exhibition. He reports: 'It's actually my former flatmate from my time in Trondheim who has started his own small publishing house for art books so I am currently preparing more material for that project. There are still some funding problems to sort out but it will most likely be released during the second half of 2005. It might contain a CD as well. There are also some new materials being released pretty soon. I have a new CD on Antifrost (www.antifrost.gr) coming up within a month and also a CDR album on and/OAR (www.and-oar.org) early next year.'

Related:
www.lassemarhaug.no
www.hapna.com

The D.R.O.N.I.N.G ONES



Alphane Moon / Our Glassie Azoth
Experimenting with an Amen / The Magician's Heavenly Chaos
UNITED KINGDOM OGGUM 12CD CD (ND)

A terrific compilation of selected materials by both these groups, most of it recorded in the 1998-1999 period; the first five cuts (short and song-based) are by Alphane Moon, the remaining three (long and electronic) are by Our Glassie Azoth. The former are the 'folky' counterpart of the latter noisy band. The two bands 'have always naturally been pretty mixed-up', admits Daf Roberts. The opening track though almost seems to combine the best of what both of them do; distorted folk tunes, fed through a welter of distortion and feedback, occasionally opening up cavernous landscapes through use of delay and echo…few records can approach this utterly 'saturated' feeling, creating endless and beautifully rich music and with a somewhat nostalgic, longing feel to it.

Two short songs are delivered in a singing voice that is practically evaporating before your very ears; this matches in some ways one of the hallmarks of the musicians, their wistful longing for a fairytale Albion that never even existed. 'The Magpie's Advice' is sung in Welsh, 'Further' in English; both reveal a strong Donovan / Nick Drake influence. Elsewhere, the Moon get into some seriously transcendent kosmik noodling on 'Opal Fire' and 'Usk'. The latter features an explosion of noisy reverberations that's like a more gentle and polite version of Merzbow. These musicians connect well to their landscape, and to earth magic and their books of spells.

Where Alphane Moon are out there performing ceremonies among the stone circles in the countryside, Our Glassie Azoth stay indoors with their extensive library of magick. OGA continue to exhibit their understanding and appreciation of Alchemical images and some well-chosen examples are here. In the 16th century, Alchemical books of renaissance science used emblems to conceal their secret chemical operations; in same way, OGA use silence to conceal their musical operations. They tell us nothing about how they do it. 'The Magician's Heavenly Chaos' is a 25-minute epic piece of electronic music, which undergoes constant transformation and mutation; every single sound in its vast corpus appears protean in its shape-shifting potential, now high, now low…A roaring screech becomes a crackling belt of asteroid activity, swoops up like a buzzard and dashes down like a magical kite, all in the space of seconds. Plenty of pulsing bass throbs and drones, percussive fizz, cosmic whale cries, schooners of the sea floating in space, horns blowing from planet to planet…this record contains much more imaginative usage of feedback than the likes of Sci Hi, and enjoyable narrative elements are not denied to the user. 'Astrolobisme' is a particularly cosmic track, conjuring instant visions of travel in a space craft with shimmering galaxies passing by the window…lovely stuff.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2004
Glynllifon, Pentre Isaf, Tregaron, SY25 6ND, UK
cylch@oggum.co.uk
www.oggum.co.uk

Our Glassie Azoth

In the Wood of Wonder Her Fountain Sings

UNITED KINGDOM OGGUM 13CDR CD-R (ND)

Like Ashtray Navigations, the Our Glassie Azoth team were a *Sound Projector* favourite back in 1999, and remain so to this day. This is a 25-minute EP which you can pick up for a mere £3.00 from their home address or website, and it even includes a little hand-printed magickal or alchemical symbol in the sleeve. 'Analogue alchemy' best describes the OGA approach to home-made electronic music…true to its title, this atmospheric gem conveys the feel of a magical forest, of a voyager lost in the woods, tree-spirits dancing around him, the smell of autumn leaves beneath his feet, fungi climbing the sides of trunks, sunlight through branches…and all tinged with psychedelic colours to boot. OGA music achieves its simple effect through the manipulations of analogue sounds, performed by the player[s] entering a trance-like, focused state. They fear not to pile on the phase and echo effect for 'cosmic' depth. They describe what they do in their catalogue as 'weirdeared dronefolk'..and modern folk music it surely is, since these rugged, earth-worshipping sound-changers are not remotely interested in technology for its own sake, unlike those million and one techie-freaks who just can't wait to digitise anything that moves. OGA should be regarded as part of the national heritage of Wales, but their music is a gift for all of Albion…and the rest of the world.

ED PINSENT 27/09/2004
Glynllifon, Pentre Isaf, Tregaron, SY25 6ND, UK
cylch@oggum.co.uk
www.oggum.co.uk

Ashtray Navigations

You Cannot Tell Cigars by the Picture on the Box

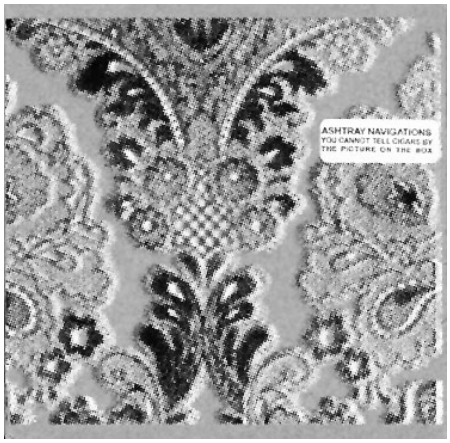
NEW ZEALAND C.PSI.P NO NUMBER CD (ND)

This is welcome return of Phil Todd, the underground UK guitarist and noise-maker, who usually recorded solo when he was releasing numerous LPs and CDs under this name in the late 1990s and beyond…this CD set however contains both solo work and collaborations, with interesting and bizarre sparring partners, to produce his most varied release to date. Todd's trademark is (1) endlessly fascinating dronework, whether produced with guitars, tape loops or keyboards and (2) a determinedly lo-fi recording approach, to deliberately exploit the effects of tape wobble, distortion and muffling. This distinctive aesthetic, where one element complements the other, is still much in evidence here. When successful, his music conveys impression that it's been going on for all eternity, and listener simply tunes in from time to time (using a poor quality radio receiver). Droning, slow-moving music, with tinkling, hissing, looping…all de-produced and de-natured by design. A 'proper' studio recording might ruin everything; better to leave finished production in hands of Todd, who knows what effect he wants and how to get it.

Circumstances of creation of music likewise remain somewhat mysterious. This is the case even when the guest musicians are named; element of doubt is added by sleeve note, referring to them as 'guessed' musicians. Who are these blank figures, and when / how did they meet with the itinerant minstrel to realise these works in secret? Todd knows that to reveal too much would detract from the power of his mystical charm. The third track features the piano work of one Clare Loughran. It's a beautiful and limpid piece of music, Phil's guitar weaving a charming melody around her piano which, with just right amount of echo, issues plangent sounds that are both haunting and lovely. Half-close ears and this might almost be mistaken for a Popol Vuh rehearsal tape. Tore Honoré Bøe and Chloe Jarvis join Todd for the fifth track, a spooked 'out of body' episode that recalls the thrice-accursed Anna Planeta sessions which Todd masterminded…then there's the pastoral power of the final cut, which combines a prog-rockish title with a T Dream/Floyd approach executed with a masterfully light touch. Though most of this CD seems to describe drugged states of one kind or another (even cigars, alluded to in title, can drug a smoker into a heavy tobacco trance), this last track shows he is capable of a simple, pastoral beauty.

Todd remains on periphery of experimental music scene, only involved in the most far-out and obscure projects even when collaborating, and then more often than not his participation is masked or kept secret in some way. Who knows, he may want to be making more money out of what he does, yet I can't quite see him on the sociable 'festival circuit' populated by those bright young things with their expensive clothes and flashing laptops. For many years now he has shown his commitment to the delivery of strong, radical and personal music. This set is no exception. On the other hand, he's probably also guaranteeing that he'll remain penniless for the rest of his career.

ED PINSENT 22/09/2004
www.cpsip.co.nz



Ashtray Navigations

When you see the moon, you've got to howl

AUSTRALIA RHIZOME RECORDINGS NO NUMBER CDR (2003)

Three quite different pieces of music feature on this live recording made in 2001. Phil Todd may have asked Duncan Tulloch and Yoko Hayashi to assist but they almost end up taking over the tracks they feature on. On track 1, Tulloch sounds off continuously if mournfully on his bugle over the forlorn sugar organ drone and a pulsing drone. On track 2, Hayashi knocks out an ever-shifting piano rhythm accompaniment to Todd's surprisingly robust guitar playing. (And you thought Ashtray Navigations was supposed to sound as though it was on its deathbed!) By himself on track 3, Todd produces a mysterious whirring, sometimes hovering, UFO drone on his synths while a doll-like carnival organ soundtrack wheezes in the background; a bit creepy at times and sure to make some feel a little light-headed and nauseous. Yes, that's the strange thing about this recording: I didn't hear anything that resembled AN's queasy trademark sound of past records but this album can still unsettle babies, wake the neighbours at night and (maybe! just maybe!) stop burglars in their tracks through your house or flat. Todd says on the CD sleeve that 'talking and mistakes' appear and while it's true there's chattering throughout this CD, the talking doesn't detract at all from the music but, rather, adds another 'mysterious' layer and some intimacy to the proceedings. Any 'mistakes' were not picked up by Yours Truly unless the somewhat fractured synth accompaniment that goes on for some time during the first half of track 1 counts. No 'print run' of this recording exists as such - John Dale of Rhizome Recordings will burn CDR copies if he gets enough orders so start rolling them in!

JENNIFER HOR
Rhizome Recordings, PO Box 319, Torrensville, SA, 5031, Australia

Bill Wood / Fredrik Ness Sevendal

Song of Degrees

NORWAY HUMBUG 016 VINYL LP [2004]

A five track LP of slow and intense marathon droning – you'll need a well-filled field pack to make it to the end of this one, soldiers. Bill Wood from New Zealand collaborates with Norwegian Fredrik Ness Sevendal; both pretty obscure players, by their own admission, although the latter has been in Slowburn and the former in 1/3 Octave Band and early manifestation of Birchville Cat Motel. The LP opens up with a fairly impressive burst of industrial-type oscillations and vaguely doomy hoover noises, interspersed with subtle voice samples repeating odd phrases. This may sound familiar, but persevere…because the long and languorous drones reveal hidden quantities, buried within their dusty grooves. Side one contains the long (and excellent) 'With The Sun in Our Eyes', incorporating a field recording of children at play. Their voices seem happy, but they are lost in the ambiguous soundscape that frames them. One thinks of similar field recording used in the famous This Heat track ('Health and Efficiency') which was making a completely different sort of statement. Here, the children turn into washed out, super 8mm ghost versions of themselves. Kinda chilling.

The duo are concerned with slow (very slow) mutation, allowing each piece to acquire more uncertain and menacing overtones as it spirals away into the oblivion of the cosmos. After a strong A side, the flip is a bit more dreary, but does include a solo contribution from each of them as compensation. There always seems to be a fine line when you're in the droning realms; fascinating monotony can so easily turn into aimless murmuring. This is the first ever vinyl release on the Humbug label. It's about half good.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2004
www.tibprod.com/humbug.htm

Birchville Cat Motel

Beautiful Speck Triumph

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 053/54 2 x CD [2004]

Not one but two discs of new material from the Motel – which is currently a solo musical act by Campbell Kneale. It's all incredibly droney. It's played using guitars, electronics, organs, wind instruments, percussion, tape loops, violins, turntables and bits of furniture – in short, all the tools of the modern craftsman. As far as I can tell there are no unpleasant surprises in store, so if you want two hours of sleepy oblivion, check into the Motel immediately. Slowly-evolving and gently shifting patterns of sound will be your portion; the pieces stay in one very attractive place for a long time, and do so with some conviction. As I recall, earlier records by this guy were a bit ramshackle, both in terms of shaky performance and ropey recording quality. Both drawbacks are now overcome by this strong new release where Kneale has developed some expertise in what he's doing, particularly in overdubbing himself, and it's also well recorded. Evocative titles include 'Speck fears', 'Trembling Frost Spires' and 'The Romance of Old Clothes', either attempts to describe the sound of the track in less abstract terms, or the particular nostalgic mood he hopes to nail down. At two discs, there's arguably more material than you need, and the second disc rambles; but the title track has some interesting layers, proving it's not all the same brand of monotony throughout.

ED PINSENT 04/10/2004
PO Box 2631, Providence, RI 02906, USA
www.lvd.4mg.com

Birchville Cat Motel

With Maples Ablaze

USA SCARCELIGHT RECORDINGS SLR21 CD (2004)

For this record, BCM becomes New Zealand's answer to the improv orchestra MIMEO as motel manager Campbell Kneale invites his pals across the world to contribute material for an organic patchwork quilt of music and sounds that end up including field recordings, tape loops, junk and broken instruments, electric and acoustic guitars, squalling babies, Reynols and even fire and boiling water. (And yes, you read right - Reynols.) Amazingly, Kneale has fitted all the contributions together so they all flow into one another naturally and smoothly, and the entire recording sounds unified with no particular artist standing out, apart from Bruce Russell who sent in the fire sounds.

Everything sounds good until towards the end when the symphony dissipates, relying too much on bird song recordings to maintain momentum and the coda is rather solemn and drawn-out. The best part of the CD starts with 'track' 4 with the train noises and peaks in 'track' 6 which features distorted squealing baby noises and music that seems to swirl in a mad percussion maelstrom. Throughout the CD the pace is measured and leisurely, perhaps unfortunately so; because the whole piece is very long - over 70 minutes - Kneale could have varied the pace (so for example 'track' 6 could've been faster and so more frenzied) and manipulated other elements: the texture of the music is smooth all the way and the ambience is crisp pretty much all the way. In all, this is a remarkable and ambitious recording even if it could be better in parts. We shall never know who exactly contributed which bits (everything is blended in so well) and we'll never find out the identity of the wackos who contributed the material for 'track' 6 - suspicion falls on a certain troupe from Buenos Aires.

The list of notables who returned musical RSVPs to the project include Tetuzi Akiyama, Kohei Nakagawa / Guilty Connector, Bruce Russell of The Dead C, Peter Stapleton (Flies Under The Sun), Sami Sanpakkila (who runs Fonal Records in Helsinki, Finland), fellow Finn Jan Anderzen, Neil Campbell of Vibracathedral Orchestra, Ralf Wehowsky, Rosy Parlane, Simon Wickham-Smith and if you haven't already guessed, Reynols. By way of conclusion, although I understand blazing maple trees and burning sap can produce alarming pyrotechnic effects similar to those on the CD sleeve, as far as I know no maples were actually harmed during the production of this CD so sensitive TSP readers in North America and other places where maples grow can rest easy. The fire noises on the CD are very low-key and the boiling water can hardly be heard.

JENNIFER HOR
www.scarcelight.com

Keith Berry

The Golden Boat

GERMANY TRENTE OISEAUX TOC034 CD (2003)

Let Berry's 'golden boat' carry you away on a pleasurable cruise…it's a sumptuous drone and crackle piece, whose front cover photograph suggests boat is floating on a lake of honey, and that's pretty much the sensual experience it brings to listener. Very much in the late Brian Eno mode; simple, touching, and gentle. The sleeve note poses the conundrum 'Under the boat no river, on the river no boat'. So while you ponder this Zen-like riddle and try to figure out what the golden boat may be and where it is, you can enjoy this gorgeous, soothing, minimal music. For a Trente Oiseaux release, it certainly has a lot of activity going on…a trip on an imaginary canal in Cleopatra's barge with lovely English landscapes for company.

ED PINSENT 02/10/2004
www.trenteoiseaux.com

Masayo Asahara

Saint Agnes Fountain

UNITED KINGDOM AUDIOLACERATION AL007 CD (2003)

Saint Agnes Fountain represents a belated attempt to realise the potential of analogue sounds and recording techniques of 30 years ago. Questions over Masayo Asahara's identity aside (the cleanness of the supposedly 'recovered' recordings might give the game away), this is not a bad droney free jazz piece but it could be improved considerably. Much of the track is dominated by Hammond organ drone put through various filters to create a spacious and dynamic if eventually monotonous sound sculpture that seems to capture the late Indian summer sound of a lot of popular mid-1970s music before punk and new wave swept all in their path. Perhaps there's a nostalgia on Martin Archer's part for some of the analogue sounds of the past, albeit arranged in ways people then did not or could not imagine though the technical possibilities and facilities certainly existed.

I don't hear the Rolling Stones (!) on this record and I don't know La Monte Young, Tony Conrad or Soft Machine, cited as

influences here, but Faust is in there. Had this work actually been recorded in 1974, Brian Eno, Robert Fripp or Fred Frith might have figured indirectly somewhere - who knows? The first 30 minutes of the piece definitely could have been edited as not much happens until track 3 when guitars and drums are added to the drone; things build up slowly to track 5 when organ playing is introduced and the bassist becomes more active. A brief trumpet solo follows, then there is the 'jazzy freak out' of bickering sax and trumpet; a long denouement and a short reprise finish off the piece. For such a long work, there's not much happening and parts could have been tightened up to strengthen and unify the piece; the organ drone might have benefited from some mid-1960s Beach Boys influence which could have created a more cavernous sound and a psychedelic 60s influence would have roughened it and made it more interesting texturally.

JENNIFER HOR
Discus, PO Box 658, Sheffield S10 3YR
www.audiolaceration.com
audiolaceration@hotmail.com
www.discus-music.co.uk/asahara

Leap-Seconds
Atomic Time
UNITED KINGDOM ENCAUSTIC RECORDS NO NUMBER CD (2004)

One of two recent-ish releases from this London duo. Neil Robinson and Peter Blundell have turned in a superb set of four droneworks on this disc. Very clean performances; the core instrumentation is acoustic double bass with electric bass guitar, and they also use piano and steel guitar. Avowed aim of the project? 'Seeking to dissolve the boundaries between minimalism and improvisation', which means that listeners who enjoy Theatre Of Eternal Music or Tony Conrad will have a field day. #1 is pretty much straight-ahead monotonous sawing of strings and conveys peaceful feelings, while #2 is a trembling piano figure in the lower register and more disquieting. A subtle guitar with muffled strings, strummed and rubbed, joins the piano. They have discipline and stay within a deliberately limited range of notes and sounds. #3 is another piano piece with pat-patting of amplified guitar strings, perhaps an additional bass guitar somewhere. Their playing is quietly affecting, and perhaps a little restrained (La Monte Young would have eaten them for breakfast), but this endearing quality adds to the sad 'Englishness' of their music. #4 sees them abandoning the 'continuo' approach in favour of disjunctive, isolated plunks and plucks; this was recorded in an echoey rehearsal room, and is eve more sorrowful and lost. A melancholy record, but not a dismal listening experience; have to admire the all-acoustic qualities, which is a breath of fresh air after so much purely digital droning.

ED PINSENT 10/10/2004

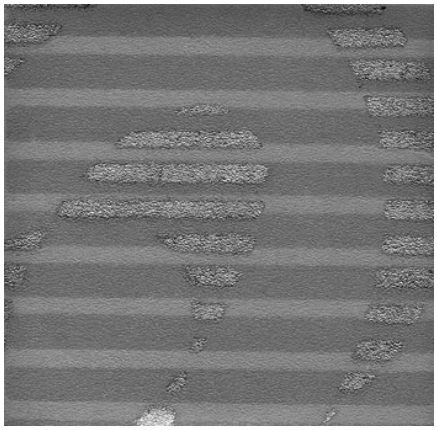
Leap-Seconds
Hints
UNITED KINGDOM ENCAUSTIC RECORDS NO NUMBER VINYL LP [2004]

Another record by Neil Robinson and Peter Blundell, this UK duo, with their studied and thoughtful approach to home-made minimalism. Once again the electric bass is joined by an acoustic one, and the players deliver slow and measured pieces arranged in Steve Reich-like patterns and structures. Over the course of the tracks, it becomes clear the artistes are systematically trying out different combinations and varied approaches to the simple actions: a specific plucking or bowing technique, once adopted, is used for duration of entire piece. There's discipline for you…the same goes for their sparing use of studio effects; digital delay stands out as one example of a tool being used to create a very precise rhythm, rather than simply adding 'depth'. This approach allows them to create compelling timing and rhythmical patterns, in efficient and comprehensive manner, much like an abstract painter might try out the different effects of brushstrokes and canvas textures.

There may be an underlying concept which relates all this to the measurement of time, specifically the beginning of Atomic Time. A sequence of numbers is laid out tabular fashion in the press release (may not be available with regular pressing). Perhaps this number-sequence served as their graphic score. In any case, it's clear they don't want to be mistakenly associated with the current vogue for 'minimalism' as manifested in improvised playing; Leap Seconds may not be innovators, but they are very disciplined, working with a clear progression of ideas, and methods are deployed strictly in the service of the progression. No spontaneous atonal bass solos, please.

Highly pleasing; limited pressing of 50 copies in clear vinyl, inside a very basic folded brown paper sleeve. A nice understated art-object release. I almost prefer this one to the CD, although both are worth investigating.

ED PINSENT 03/11/2004
PO Box 45417, London SE26 6YH, UK
encaustic@fastmail.fm



Minit
Now Right Here
GERMANY STAUBGOLD 53 CD (2004)

Staubgold label is often home to quite delicious and tasteful resonating droner records – this continues in like tradition. Minit are a duo named Jasmine Gufford and Torben Tilly, no strangers to this magazine since their Sigma debut in 1999 when they were based in Sydney – now they're whooping it up in Berlin. Working together or solo, they turn in four long tracks of near-infinite and very gentle drones of melancholic nature; this CD presents a smattering of their work produced in 2002-2003. 'Now Right Here' started life as a French Horn sample (played by a real life musician), with subsequent rearrangement of generated elements and added live electronics performed by Minit. If that appears too much like synthetic processing to you, there are still human qualities – the most prominent of which be sad and lonely feelings, as you are launched across this endless highway of life with no assist from family or friends. As to highways, this track vaguely resembles 'Autobahn', but with no melody, or beat.

'CG' likewise has a rather sad air to it; maybe that's the only emotive response they're capable of evoking. But formally speaking this one reveals something of a flair for miniaturism, via an accumulation of small details, which elevates this work an inch or two about the hordes of conventional electronica. If that makes their music out to be little more than embroidery, then turn next to 'I J Variation' if you're seeking a grittier and noisier side to these folk. Despite top layer of static noise however, this track likewise turns out to be a formula 'droner' like all the others. Lastly comes 'Ijmuiden', which sees them almost in 'gothic' mood, as close as they come to pitching their altruistic music in a minor key. A reasonably strong collection, not overly processed, not overly nice.

ED PINSENT 05/10/2004

Pauline Oliveros & Reynols

The Minexcio Connection: Live! At The Rosendale Cafe

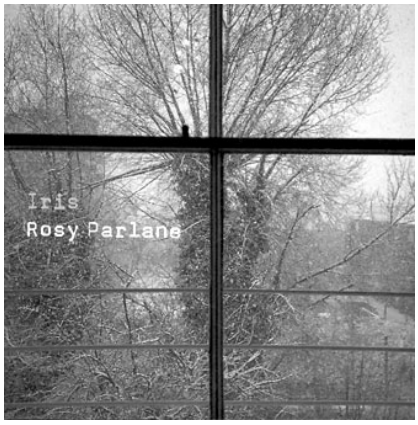
USA ROARATORIO ROAR 06
VINYL LP (2003)

A great LP of four lengthy 'deep listening' groany-droney pieces, very slow and heavy, recorded live at a tiny and marginal venue in New York in August 2000. It still never ceases to amaze me how Reynols ever made a connection with Oliveros, the 1960s electronic pioneer who has since chosen a mystical path and become a kind of charismatic figure for dissatisfied West-Coast Americans, who seek spiritual enlightenment through sound. You may recall the astonishing CD Reynols made with her, *Pauline Oliveros in the Arms of Reynols*. That was mostly mutual studio-processing as I recall, where this live recording is quite different, and documents moments of a very sympathetic live performance among a bunch of like-minded outcasts. Besides the two Reynols 'regulars' Anla Courtis and Moncho Conlazo, there's the part-time Reynols guy Pacu Conlazo playing mouth harp, percussion and using his voice, and Ione (friend of Oliveros) adding further voice, and lyrics.

Like their previous collaboration though, the themes of the music – indeed the very dynamic of the chosen pace of performance – seem to come mostly from Pauline O, rather than Reynols. The music sounds just like long-form explorations of underground caverns, real Journey to the Centre of the Earth type stuff. The more you listen, the more grand-scaled vistas open up…weather, sun, skies; chasms, caves, valleys; deserts, sands, waste ground…amazing geographic features, across which our intrepid souls make their wandering musical pilgrimage. Considering the performance took place in a venue the size of Jules Verne's pocket handkerchief, this sense of staggering scale is all suggested in the depth of the sounds they made; quite an achievement.

Performed largely on acoustic instruments, although Anla does have his electric guitar; the music features the slow squeezey drones of Oliveros with her accordion, while the Reynols team use didjeridoo, marmonio (?), mouth harp and rovello (?); all musicians moan away with their solemn intoning voices. There are further excellent examples of chanting and ethnic aboriginal styled wailing on side two, with 'Cathedral Juice'. Ione adds a poetry recital on 'Six For New Time', but her voice is rendered indistinct at it murmurs vaguely about such quantities as time, life, and 'this one'…her meanings become submerged in a general murk of accordion, drones, and percussion dings marking map references.

It's possible that Reynols, with their spiky punk aesthetic, have brought a certain grittiness to the project and keep this music from straying too far into dozy, pretentious 'New Age' territory, which is more than can be said for some of Oliveros's recent releases. The longest work on offer here, the 17 minute 'Cosmother fell asleep inside a Galaxy-Cake', is clearly blessed with an Oliveros title



and might simply be a coat-hanger for all of her dippy cosmic earth-mother fixations, but as rendered by this unlikely mixture of personalities, it succeeds as it's supposed to - a protracted, spaced-out, echoey-cosmo-vibe, naturally-resonating epic gem. A fine release with a great cover painting too.

ED PINSENT 30/10/2004
PO Box 300574, Minneapolis, MN 55403, USA
www.roaratorio.com

Rosy Parlane

Isis

UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TO:58 CD (2004)

A pleasant but rather tame recording from Rosy Parlane aka Paul Douglas, his first for Touch. After years of hearing music by this New Zealand electronica drone-meister (his first one was released in 1998), I can't honestly say that I'm any more or less moved by this latest elegant package of minimalist droning music. I have to say at this point that if you've heard previous recordings by Parlane (many of which involve collaborations with others but he has at least 2 solo albums on the Sigma label), then you know he's capable of doing much better work than *Iris* but if you're unfamiliar with his brand of laptopiary, you'd do better to start with his early work in the New Zealand band Thela and his solo / collaborative albums on Sigma. Quite inward-looking and wintry in its outlook (paradox intended) - the insularity of *Iris* is reinforced by Jon Wozencroft's photos featuring greys and blues and shades between, and dreary or overcast weather conditions to boot.

Parlane used guitar, piano and organ to provide the base material for the digital sound processing. His single-minded approach to droning has now reached stage where it seems so refined as to have become almost completely abstract; *Isis* does little more than describe, in three partitioned stages, an enormous man-made monolith such as an impossibly large skyscraper, with mirrored walls of glass, standing in a remote desert. Parlane is fascinated enough to relate to us, in some detail, the surface textures of said monolith with a relentless, methodical monotony. Track 1 features a long passage of digital rain, not heavy but not a light drizzle either - it's that annoying lingering rain which makes the air damp and heavy and leaves a smell on your clothes. No, you can't smell anything from *Iris* actually unless you're smelling some electricity from your CD player quietly fuming because it can't stand that extended rain passage. In moments of usual glibness, I may have previously compared this Parlane fellow to Philip Glass. Think now of a Glass composition where even the trademark arpeggios are not discernible, and instead every hard edge has been blurred and softened into a diffuse cloud of non-specific colour, like some fuzzy watercolour painting. Yet still the minimalist pattern remains discernible.

Track 2 is relatively cheerier and quite serene, just floating along and turning into a very long

drone. Once upon a time we would have called this music 'isolationist' though I usually associate this term with musicians who deliberately turned away from the world because of their belief that humans were so ignorant and stupid and the world's problems were so intractable, to concentrate on creating immersive sonic worlds. 'Iris' on the other hand is a different creature altogether - it's hard to tell what inspired the music to be so insular and the packaging provides no information in this respect.

The other curious side-effect of Parlane's technical improvements – I assume that's the process that's relevant to a composer of this ilk – is the very disembodied sound of this CD, so that the monolith in question is now apparently weightless, free-floating – much like the Magritte painting of the castle perched on top of impossibly tall and massy rock suspended above the ocean in the Surrealist manner. Parlane indeed lives in this castle in the air, and what's more he's happily employed showing visitors around his domain. It's hard to get a purchase here, yet if you accept the entire immersive effect then you find yourself getting drunk on the sheer volume of it all, like dropping bodily into a vast ocean of Evian water. In fact, I can virtually see the Evian brand name, as large as a continent, as though suspended in a bottle like a toy deep-sea diver. Parlane's ideas may be over-stretched, but without its long-form presence, this music wouldn't mean very much at all in first place. On each track, the music starts off fine but does not sustain or develop its premise/promise. Quality control and editing seem in short-ish supply and the recording could have done with several minutes shaved off each piece. First-time tourists to Laptopia, go straight to Fennesz; his records are more accomplished works of art and in recent work he demonstrates concern with social and cultural issues which is more than can be said for many of his fellow Laptoplanders. Perhaps the aseptic nature of the music and its production could be a problem in this respect.

RROSE SELAVY
www.touchmusic.org.uk

Drawing Room
Music for Performance
NEW ZEALAND KRKRKRK RECORDINGS KRK126 CD (2003)

Here's one from a low-budget New Zealand label, a CD-R wrapped in poorly-printed thin paper whereon available data is pretty scant. Seems to be solo turns by David Khan, label owner, and derived from performance/installations he did in certain improv and gallery spaces in that Antipodean island. The droning, metallic racket he turns in isn't half bad by any standards, but it's a very lonely and alienated atmosphere that he summons up…listener is all but lost, wandering friendless in a harsh and metallic zone. This effect is created on the first piece by long and largely unrelieved passages of extended metallic howls and screeches, derived mainly from maltreatment of percussion instruments; where Eddie Prévost and others summon up delightful noise from use of violin bow across percussion, Khan must be using a painful surgical instrument like a bone saw. The second long piece is executed mainly via digital tools, samples of several non-musical sounds (long list is thoughtfully provided) which are put through that wonderful device and God's gift to music, the Ensoniq sampling piano. In Khan's hands, this tool results in equally cold music; he exudes a long, depressing, rain-soaked sigh of melancholy. This might stand of chance of remaining on my deck for longer, were it not for overall sound being so non-descript and (in places) overly familiar. May suit a rainy day or hungover mood.

ED PINSENT 21/09/2004
krkrkrk@hotmail.com
http://go.to.krkrkrk

Moljebka Pvlse
Tamon
SWEDEN SEGERHUVA SEGER 8 CD (2004)

A solo turn by Mathias Josefson of Stockholm. Two basic modes to Mr Pvlse: extreme noise and boring drones. Neither mode is remotely enjoyable. 'Dry Land' is the first time the noise kicks in, and it's a constipated, writhing racket, surprisingly airless and lacking in real weight or substance. It's just coarse and nasty. 'Arizona recursive' and 'In dust and ashes' don't deliver loud volume, just bleak and deadly ambient drones intended to sound menacing in some way. 'Like You Cared' presents yet more of the intense noise, with the intensity taken up a notch. The sleeve shows an empty highway, perhaps in the Arizona desert; 'Arizona recursive' might indicate visit of Mr Pvlse to said USA state, but if so he hasn't discerned any natural beauty in it. Track titles above seem to point to his detached, blasé attitude to everything. A tedious, repetitious and flat record of dreary rubbish.

ED PINSENT 10/10/2004
www.segerhuva.se

Cremaster
32.41 n/m 2
GREECE ABSURD #32 CD (2003)

This one was issued as 123 copies only and, according to the label's website, it's already sold out at source. Nice going. It comes, memorably, wrapped in a piece of sandpaper with the credits and titles printed (very badly) on the inside. Use of sandpaper may refer back to Aphex Twin's use of said material on his turntables; or to the Durutti Column LP cover on Factory Records, itself a very knowing reference to Guy Debord's Situationist book that was issued in a sandpaper cover. That was intended as a hostile gesture; an object that would efface all known literature by physically 'grinding' away anything in its proximity. Then again, the cover may simply indicate the very abrasive nature of Cremaster's sounds on this occasion. Aye, harsh textures galore from the two severe Spaniard electronica-meisters. It's one of the most interesting exercises I've heard from the two of them; intensive, continuous exploration of quite difficult digital territory. The bad-tempered grumbling doesn't let up for one second. Play the whole thing on headphones and you'll wake up to find your entire dome has been sanded down and smoothed off to a high degree of finish. As a follow-up, they should issue a record disguised as a tin of weather sealant or varnish, so you can finish the job.

ED PINSENT 07/11/2004
www.anet.gr/absurd/releases.htm

The Hafler Trio
A House Waiting For Its Master
ITALY ROSSBIN RSLP 001 10" VINYL LP (2003)

Andrew McKenzie is on a roll. Suffering from a life-threatening combination of illnesses, and prevented by Kafkaesque bureaucracy from being treated for them, he has thrown himself headlong into his work. His first album as the Hafler Trio in some years, Whistling About Chickens (reviewed in SP12), has been followed by a slew of limited edition CD and vinyl releases on a bewildering variety of labels. In a crisis such as this you find out who your friends are, and McKenzie's renewed burst of activity has been aided not only by the labels that have released this material, but by the artists such as Autechre, Michael Gira and Bruce Gilbert who have collaborated with him on many of them. Eccentric but fascinating live events in London and Preston have also contributed to McKenzie's heightened public profile.

A House Waiting For Its Master is a 10" EP comprising three beautiful, drone-based pieces. Occupying the whole of side one, 'Everything That Stops You Becomes Your Idol' is the densest of the three - a shape-shifting zone of phased frequencies that pulsate with an uncanny energy. On side two, 'Nobody Had Come In, But Someone Had Arrived' hovers with unearthly grace, its shimmering drone sounding like a reverberant cathedral organ.

McKenzie twists the knife, however, on the final track, 'The Tragedy of the Loss of Inaccessibility'. Here a harsher, more discordant drone increases dangerously in volume, paralleled by an infernal rhythm. These suddenly cut out and, as the listener breaks out in a cold sweat, a malfunctioning machine crackles and spits. A moment of quiet is broken by an uneasy frequency and a final, sinister drone.

The record is pressed on thick, translucent vinyl, and comes with a four-page leaflet containing McKenzie's usual cryptic texts. The news that he has now resolved his residency issues, and is finally able to receive treatment for his illnesses, is incalculably welcome.

RICHARD REES JONES
www.rossbin.com

quiet electronic

Elio Martusciello
Aesthetics of the Machine
ITALY BOWINDO 01 CD (2003)

It appears that there are indeed people out there who have tired of trying to communicate anything to a human audience, frustrating exercise that this is, and have chosen to pitch their work to a non-human audience instead. Elio Martusciello is one such person, who feels a need to empathize with all of the various devices that can be grouped under the label 'machines'. He defines his musical research as having gone beyond Man's point of listening to experiment with what he calls the machine's point of listening, hence the slightly earnest title of this CD.

The basis for his claim rests mainly on the fact that the range of frequencies he uses extends beyond human hearing: upwards to 20khz (which theoretically is not beyond the range of human hearing at all, but in our noise-saturated reality probably is), and downwards to 16hz. Thus, because these frequencies are beyond the range of human perception (although again I should point out that particularly low frequencies can often still be 'felt' by the body and therefore perceived, due to the phenomenon of resonant frequencies) Martusciello has decided that they must be being perceived by your toaster and microwave, not to mention your television and gas boiler.

Silence is golden, or so the saying goes. Of course we now realise this for the naïve fantasy that this is. Maybe Martusciello has had a revelation similar to that of John Cage, who famously declared that even in the supposed absolute silence of an anechoic chamber he could still perceive the low thump of his heartbeat and the high crackle of his nervous system. For whatever reason, Martusciello seems to take great delight on pointing out the great irony here: that the periods perceived as silence on this CD are not really silent at all, but instead indicate the presence of frequencies that we simply cannot hear. In his own florid prose, which bears the traces of being far too familiar with much post-modern philosophy, he points out that this CD is the 'place of paradoxes' where 'emptiness and silence are the consequence of total fullness'.

I for one would struggle to say just where I have heard such drivel before. The entire album sounds more than a little like somebody fiddling with a sine wave generator. Of course I am bound not to get the point of it all because I am not one of Martusciello's privileged machines, and after all this CD is all about the 'Aesthetics of the Machine'. No, I much like the entirety of Martusciello's potential audience I suspect am in fact human, and in my book when I hear silence, this is generally a pretty good indication that things are silent. The contents of the CD seem to contain no sign of rational development and instead appear as random snippets of various pure frequencies separated by those pregnant silences.

Possibly the only thing more unbelievable than Martusciello's level of faith in his own compositional genius is his unrestrained naivety. One suspects that only the person brave enough to call an album 'Aesthetics of the Machine' could come up with track titles such as 'Out of Our Mind', '0db-clashes (toxic)', and 'Total fulness[sic] (inexpressive)' Only the person who could conceive of titles like 'Hz-limits of the technology', and 'Point of Listening (beyond human)' could state with all sincerity that the sound-inspired images of the album's cover art are 'completely unreliable, they only tell us of an other[sic] world…beyond our mind.'

Martusciello invests an awful lot of energy telling us of the many qualities of this work. He mines the full / empty metaphor for as much as it's worth and then some, he talks passionately about borders and paradigms, and how this work answers to a radical logic. The Third Reich also went to work with a radical logic, experimenting with 'sound canons' during WWII, which were designed to produce subsonic frequencies around 11hz. Just about right to induce a bowel collapse and painful death without causing any collateral damage. It would have been hugely ironic would it not, if through the use of frequencies beyond human perception the Nazis had given us a world in which an album that makes great claims for frequencies beyond human perception did not exist?

AARON ROBERTSON
C/o Valerio Tricoli, Via Paolo Costa 3, 40137 Bologna, Italia
www.bowindorecordings.com
www.fringesrecordings.com

Steve Roden / Tu m'
Broken. Distant. Fragrant
ITALY ROSSBIN RS012 CD (2003)

A simple and effective collaborative outing, and one indicative of a sympathetic meeting of minds.... I gather the parties involved never made any physical contact with each other, but rather sent each other discs of 'source materials' through the mail, allowing Roden in California and Tu'm in Italy to remix, re-record, manipulate and edit their mutual bits and pieces in the privacy of their home studios. One of many releases of late which, I've noticed, go some way to mangle the printed word as it appears on the sleeve; the tactic employed here is to drop vowels from words, and render the missing letters with underscores. The texts for the track titles appear twice on the artworks, in both conventional and unreadable mode. This, I assume, corresponds to the gaps, drop-outs, and faults that are present in the music, creating interesting voids and spaces which the artists mutually probe in search of hidden truths that might eventually dribble out.

Roden in particular, I think, presumes that man's perception of the reality of his environment is at best incomplete, at worst damaged – mangled by our overall obstinacy, stupidity and greed which leaves us for the most part blind and deaf to the eternal beauties, so that the truth is always coming to us through a glass darkly. To some extent, this uncertainty might be reflected in the stuttering and halting delivery of some of the musical phrases, particularly in 'Fountain' where something resembling a coherent musical phrase has clearly been segmented and broken into looped phrases, then layered with additional confusing information.

Roden may want his sounds to help us decode and uncover new realities. He is well-established in the mode of quiet recordings and quiet performance, and is generally credited with innovation of term 'lower case sound' to describe this area of endeavour, which nowadays is something so widespread as to almost constitute a genre of sorts. No denying this is a fairly quiet record, yet if ye cranketh up the volume on yon stereo, can discern an interesting micro-universe of wriggling and vibrating presences, much like a nest of tiny white moths or small, barely-breathing worms. Come to that, further nature experiences are suggested by titles such as 'Flowers Drawn', 'Fountains' and 'Geographies'; and the sounds themselves which frequently resemble gusts of wind, or the roaring of ocean waves, or insects chattering quietly on a starlit night. Roden's something of a 'twig and feather' man when it comes to selecting sound-generating objects on stage (not unlike the Animist Orchestra), so any connection with the fruits and flora of the earth is not inept. Unlike much heartless electronica, this record proposes a miniaturised version (albeit a highly processed version) of the globe, almost like artificial life in a test-tube.

The only slight drawback is that despite the transcendent beauty of the sounds contained in them, not one of these five compositions really goes anywhere. Having arrived at the perfect spot in the forest, our poets are content to dwell in that same place, and reiterate to each other, over and over, the insistent beauty of what they behold.

ED PINSENT 18/09/2004
www.rossbin.com

Valerio Tricoli
"Did they? Did I?"
ITALY BOWINDO 02 CD (2003)

Here's another ultra-quiet Bowindo release, demonstrating similar inscrutable qualities as

all items heard from this label so far. Though described as lasting 19 minutes, this short piece actually extends for twice that length after a misleading ending. On early spins, its apparent emptiness baffled me completely – seeming so utterly vacant as to bypass listening altogether. A headphone listen persuaded me otherwise, and when cranked up real loud on speaker playback, it provides a fairly convincing environmental 'construct'. Commencing with the sound of doors snapping shut (the doors of a motel, apparently), it suggests an imaginary 'space' in similar ways to Michael Schumacher and his *Room Pieces* (see last issue). Space is delineated exclusively through use of electronic bleeps and drones, which seem to draw lines in the air as surely as an architect wielding a Rapidograph on Permatrace. Some resultant details are so sharp as to be almost painful, while others appear to be happening miles away. A few occasional snippets of documentary recording leak in, but do little to relieve sense of enclosure which is so complete as to lock the listener into a titanium coffer labelled 'sound art experience'.

Releases like this really ought to arrive with some form of health warning. Tricoli has apparently poured years of effort into its realisation, and it might document some part of his life that we know nothing of. The title notably doesn't quite fall into my printed-word-mangle category, but its fragmentary approach to sentence construction does lead to alienating effect, and suggests deep uncertainty about everything. Do events really happen? Have we remembered them correctly? There are further reflections of this sense of doubt: artist's description is a 19 minute piece and indeed after fairly dramatic first half, a climax is reached at that point after some disappointingly ordinary drone-and-chime burbling…then a further 20 minutes of playtime ensures, which appears to be same materials we've just heard or outtakes from same, redeployed in much less interesting way. You gotta know when to quit. This originally came out as a tape on the Freedom From label in USA. Valerio Tricoli is described as 'an enigma of Italian electronic music', and none dare gainsay that assertion.

ED PINSENT 21/09/2004
C/o Valerio Tricoli, Via Paolo Costa 3, 40137 Bologna, Italia
www.bowindorecordings.com
www.fringesrecordings.com

Paulo Raposo and Marc Behrens
Further Consequences of Reinterpretation
PORTUGAL CRÓNICA 008 CD (2004)

To give this mo-fo a chance, you may want to look past the austere sleeve design and rather portentous title, which is really just a fancy way of saying it's another stupid remix 'project'. Starting point was CD release by Nosei Sakata, also known as *0, who not unreasonably vouchsafed a release called *0.000* into the hands of other artists, Behrens being one of these lucky few. As it turns out, we have a lengthy and testing workout in brittle electronic minimalism to cope with here, but the process of its assimilation (unlike, say, that of subsisting on porridge for 12 months) will not be unrewarding. First off, I note with some interest that this music is quite different to last batch of sounds I heard from severe and anti-social recidivist Behrens, which (though enjoyable in their own unique ways) were bordering on totally abstract voids and so thoroughly internalised as to convey little more than private meanings. This one is much more busy and informed by some vague sense of purpose, much like an armour-plated giant turtle lumbers down Seven Sisters Road, mowing down all obstacles in its path. As frequently happens.

Principle fuel for this purposefulness could be simply the emotion of anger…seems that Behrens was filled with a slow-burn rage at start of this remix relay-race, due to disc or tape from primary contributor being delivered by officious Post Office clerk demanding additional payment for customs! Hot-headed Behrens apparently hit the ceiling – it's no surprise to any who work with him that he needs a new plaster-job every couple of weeks – and, in the usual twists and turns that these collaborative projects take, he ended up calling in Raposo to soothe his shattered nerves. He arrived with his ice-pack, a large bottle of whisky and two glasses, and 20 filter-tip cigarettes in a shopping bag, and soon all was on the mend. This is a more interesting version of what really happened, because frankly any written description of the process of remixing is utterly tedious and boring. But let this be a lesson to any who dare cross digital swords with this hot-tempered fellow.

Take note of printed booklet also, which contains a further example of word-mangling. This one takes delight in mutating and obscuring the original text of the title of the work by wrapping it up with computer-generated blobs. No doubt this parallels the processing treatments used by Behrens and his cohort on the original disc of sounds. However, it sounds like the usual form of linear computer-processing has been eschewed in favour of a more pleasing 'organic' development, if such a word can be applied to digital music. I have heard similar process-based work where the underlying grid systems of the computers are brought to the surface, resulting in a four-square hammering effect that, at loud volumes, can just pound the listener into submission. I'm thinking now of Karkowski, Ryoji Ikeda and Carsten Nicolai. This disc is not only more varied, but succeeds in creating illusions of near-impossible spatial depth and clarity; very sharp, crystalline sounds, precisely located within the ordering scheme of the composers.

ED PINSENT 20/09/2004
www.cronicaelectronica.org
Rua Miguel Bombarda 457, 405-382 Porto, Portugal
www.materiaprima.net

Ronnie Sundin
Standards
SWEDEN KISSY RECORDS KISCDR013 CD-R (2004)

I've struggled to find some value in this miniature by Sundin, the latest release from this Swedish digital artist whose previous work I have clasped to my bosom while simultaneously scratching my head in bewilderment. This one's beyond bewildering…it's a total enigma. Mostly silent, interrupted by occasional bursts of near-inaudible crackles, the piece eventually starts to 'liven up' after 7or 8 minutes, as murmuring and moaning sounds are hesitantly added to the ineffectual crackling. But no sooner does he get something going, than – click! He shuts it off again, leaving you facing the void once again. I'm starting to see a blank piece of paper with doodles scrawled on one corner of it. It all seems so tentative, as though he's afraid to ruin the lovely virgin state of silence with anything so unnecessary as an audible sound. Sundin created this puzzler in Summer 2003, using leftovers from other works he had lying around his worktable; 'The birds have no names', is all he can tell us. Where before I perceived his reticence as an asset, and each record as a charming absurdity, here it seems virtually pointless to the point of being infuriating.

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004
ronnie@ronsun.net
www.kissyrecords.com

Ronnie Sundin is interviewed this issue.

Giuseppe Ielasi / Renato Rinaldi
Oreledigneur
ITALY BOWINDO 05 CD (2004)

Compared with other sonic delights auditioned on Bowindo label thus far in my life, this one is slightly more audible than the rest. It also hovers somewhere in Rafael Toral area, with its slow and sad chiming sounds and portentous ambient backings. Sure enough, it turns out (like Toral) to involve heavy use of guitars; Ielasi and Rinaldi play 'motorised' versions of these instruments, presumably allowing some small motor to vibrate or drive strings with tiny wheels. Resultant emanations are blended with field recordings, and unconventional percussion rattling about in free mode. Though precise details of objects used are scanty, this pair seem to preoccupied with a theme of 'scale' – playing with both large and small things in the physical plane. Perhaps they see themselves as little more than insignificant half-notes dotted on the musical stave of the cosmos. Ielasi has made one record with Domenico Scajno on the Erstwhile label; Rinaldi is new to me. You might need some patience with this one, but it's a generally inoffensive and pleasant set of gentle clattering and grinding, semi-musical meanderings.

ED PINSENT 11/10/2004
C/o Valerio Tricoli, Via Paolo Costa 3, 40137 Bologna, Italia
www.bowindorecordings.com
www.fringesrecordings.com

WEEP NO MORE

La Virgin de la Macarena

✸The Chartists✸

✸✸By HARLEY RICHARDSON✸✸
with STEVE BYNGHALL and JANSON HARRISON

THE POP CHARTS – LOVE THEM OR LOATHE them, its difficult to ignore them. Chart music isn't confined to mainstream pop radio, it's also played incessantly on TV; if you leave the house to get away from it, you'll hear it in shops, pubs and elevators. Prolonged exposure can be a will-to-live-sapping exercise, what with the range of acts you'll find making up a typical week's chart: histrionic girl groups, manufactured boy bands, novelty euro-popsters, egomaniac divas, pallid indie-rockers, tone-deaf crooners, American soft-metallers, limpid r'n'b/hip hop acts, and Elton John.

Pop in general means two things: 1) music bought and enjoyed by a lot of people, and 2) a bouncy, cheerful and lightweight style of music, usually lacking artistic ambitions. On both these counts, pop's presence in our culture is disproportional - pop music isn't actually that popular. Singles sales have declined dramatically in recent years; a high selling single nowadays would barely have registered in the charts of the 60s or 70s.

It seems likely that pop's presence in our lives is more to do with it being a cheap and uncontroversial way of filling airtime than its significance to the population of Britain. The modern pop industry is a cynical beast, with low expectations of its audience, and accordingly the audience has gone elsewhere for its entertainment – nowadays chart records are mostly bought by children, specifically teenage girls. Actually, that's probably doing teenage girls a disservice as it seems even they can't be tempted to part with their pocket money - whilst we were putting this feature together, DJ Eric Prydz's 'Call On Me' got to number 1 having sold just 23,519 copies in a week, the lowest recorded sales for a record at the top of the hit parade.

But, for all this, it's all too easy to tar all chart music with the same brush - we shouldn't forget that the current day music industry still spews up the occasional sparkling gem. The excellent book *Bubblegum Music Is The Naked Truth: The Dark History of Prepubescent Pop, from the Banana Splits to Britney Spears* makes an impressive case for throwaway pop music, but diverges from orthodoxy in refusing to draw the line at the end of the 1960s, unapologetically placing the likes of Britney Spears in the same tradition as The Monkees and 1910 Fruitgum Company. Cartoonist Peter Bagge (who ironically is identified by many with the Seattle slacker rock scene) contributed to that book and also wrote 'Swimming in shit and loving it!', a persuasive piece in *Mojo* (reprinted and expanded in *Hate Annual #4*) in which he justified his love of contemporary bubblegum music whilst taking to task some of the unthinking attitudes that inform pop criticism. Artists celebrated by Bagge including some seriously cred-free acts (Geri Halliwell, B*Witched) and lesser known (in the UK) international artists such as kid rapper Aaron Carter and Japanese girl group Morning Musume (who with their many members and profligate side projects come across like a teen pop version of the Acid Mothers Temple).

Bagge isn't the only one to come out in defence of contemporary pop. Over the last year or so, we've had a pop-themed issue of *Time Out*, Nick Hornby's muddle-headed celebrations of middle-of-the-road hits, and Paul Morley waxing pretentious about Kylie. Maybe you've noticed the growing trend for people to admit to the so-called 'guilty pleasures' in their record collections – perhaps you've even bought DJ Sean Rowley's *Guilty Pleasures* CD compiling some of these. But secret nostalgic passions for Leo Sayer or Toto notwithstanding, we're not convinced that this heralds a new era of open-mindedness and honesty about pop. Whilst we've no desire to get into some sort of 'uncooler than thou' competition, it does seem that important factors in securing critical favour are 1) detached and cool 'attitudes' (eg Sugababes, Liberty X, All Saints) and 2) heavy doses of irony (Kylie, Scissor Sisters); both of which involve attempts by the artists to distance themselves from the day-glo banality of the music they make. Which means that the best examples of modern day pop are often ignored.

And that leads us to the observation that many of the criticisms levelled at pop music are actually reactionary in nature. Consider for a moment some commonly-used pejoratives: repetitive, simple, artificial, manufactured, synthesised, throwaway, no lyrics - all terms which in a different context (say, rock or electronic music) are readily acknowledged as plus points. And such jibes often go hand in hand with cries for a return to 'authentic' music using 'real instruments', a restriction which if applied would wipe out much of the great music of the last century, pop, avant-garde or otherwise. Whilst the likes of Busted and McFly have undeniably been putting the 'band' back into 'boy band' over the last couple of years, we're not as convinced as some that this is a positive development in itself.

A couple of additional factors mitigate against pop's wider acceptance: the ubiquitously slick production is often perceived as an affront to the spontaneous and rough'n'ready ideal of rock'n'roll / garage music / punk and all that has come since; the corporate work-for-hire origins of the songs are routinely pitched in opposition to the romantic notion of the independent artist/creator. But give me a good manufactured pop record any day over the limited horizons of a supposedly exciting rock band like The Libertines. The creative impulses driving the creation of music thankfully aren't always subject to such narrow categorisations – as we think the songs below will confirm. And whilst we at The Sound Projector don't like to encourage short attention spans, it's amazing how much some pop songs pack into 3 minutes. There's a lot to be said for a concise and succinct expression of a musical idea - something that many

alternative and avant-garde acts could learn from.

As yet we know very little about the musicians, songwriters or producers involved. Perhaps you're aware that a behind-the-scenes job putting together pop records is now a profitable career option for the brighter members of the performing fraternity, and maybe you even know some of their names – say, Betty Boo, Cathy Dennis or Guy Chambers – but what could you say about their techniques or ideas? Few appear to have signature styles; it's difficult to tell who's made a record just by listening to it. No one from the current crop of creators has the high profile enjoyed by Stock Aiken and Waterman in the 80s, nor have they been subjected to the exhaustive analysis and documentation given to pop maestros of the 50s and 60s. This would seem to be a deliberate move by those involved, to avoid distracting from the comely charms of their acts, and also because the target audience isn't particularly interested. It would seem that pop writers are the only people in Britain who don't want to be famous right now. And it's a sign of the times that when attention is actually paid to what goes on behind the scenes, it tends to focus on the entrepreneurial chutzpah of the A&R men and managers involved (such as Louis Walsh and Simon Cowell) rather than the people who wrote or made the records - the music might as well have been conjured out of thin air, which is perhaps the intended effect. (It's worth noting that the trend is reversed with R&B production and writing teams who tend to be artists in their own right, but that's another story).

It will be interesting to see if in time these musicians come to be seen in a similar light to the likes of Phil Spector, the Tin Pan Alley crowd, the Wrecking Crew or The Funk Brothers. From this vantage point it's already clear that attempts to draw straightforward musical parallels won't get us very far. In a valiant attempt to delve deeper, Peter Bagge tried to track down the people responsible for his favourite tunes, but ran up against record company resistance and creator indifference. In the end he concluded that talking to the creators was unlikely to be that illuminating anyway - they appear to think of themselves as artisans rather than artistes and are content to live in relative obscurity (no doubt comforted by their enormous royalty cheques). Bagge's only 'catch' was an interview with Fredrik Thomander of Epicentre Productions, Swedish poodle-rockers-turned-pop-production-team, whose most memorable observation was this: when they switched from writing heavy metal to writing pop songs the only thing that changed was they stopped using the distortion pedal.

So anyway, for the time being at least, we have to rely on what out ears tell us, and on that principle we bring you an irony-free tribute to some of our favourite chart hits of the last decade and a bit. And we're not talking about rock music, 'urban' music, or accidental avant garde hits, it's gleefully all-out cynical pop records that we're concerned with here. Not all of these we disagreed on, but each record below is loved by at least one member of the Sound Projector chart squad. We make no claim that this is a new golden age of pop. Far from it, the quality of the music we highlight below only begs the question, why isn't more of it as good?

Sources: *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth*, ed Kim Cooper and David Smay. USA FERAL HOUSE 2001, ISBN 0-922915-69-5.

✷Pop artistes✷

Bryan Adams & Mel C
When You're Gone
UNITED KINGDOM A&M
5828212 CD SINGLE (1998)

On paper a collaboration between Bryan Adams and Mel C should be hideous, but in fact they both emerge blinking from some musically dark places to deliver this wonderful slice of upbeat pop rock. Driven from the start by a stabbing and swirling organ line, underpinned by some chugging good-time boogie guitars and radio-friendly drums, the energy levels are kept up throughout its duration. The verse is so catchy it sounds like a chorus, and the chorus is even catchier. The words are unpretentious and bland, but at the same time refreshingly un-macho, a boy and girl who are missing each other so much that even food don't taste that good.

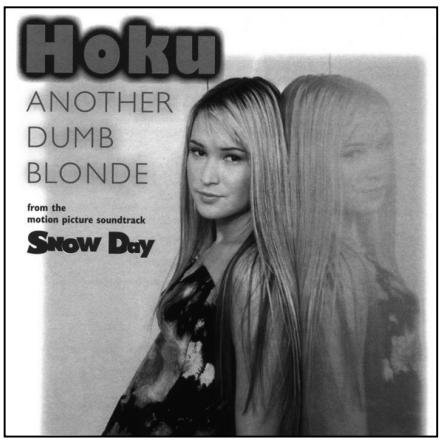
Essentially a driving song, it's the Bryan and Mel vocal combo which really places it a cut above the rest. Individually there is much to dislike about both their voices, but the harmony pairing of the two really gels here. Mel C's booming but reedy voice sounds difficult to harmonise with but because Bryan's own voice is not dissimilar in quality, the sum is better than the parts. In fact if the vocals were any lower in the mix it would be difficult to distinguish them. However just at the right level with a tiny bit of separation they sound great – a fact which is not lost on the producers – who ensure the harmony vocal is delivered again and again throughout the song.

There's a slightly unconvincing attempt to give the song spontaneity by overdubbing a 'Here we go' from Bryan and a giggle from Mel. At the time there were also some almost certainly manufactured rumours over a romance between the pair. However the record company didn't have to go to these lengths to win us over. Played to death on British radio, the song still sounds remarkably fresh to the ears of the Sound Projector juke box jury.

STEVE BYNGHALL

Hoku
Another dumb blonde
USA GEFFEN 0694972462 CD SINGLE (2000)

This US hit (a Peter Bagge recommendation) hails from the soundtrack of the Chevy Chase flick 'Snow Day', not a film that made much impression on this side of the Atlantic. Hoku



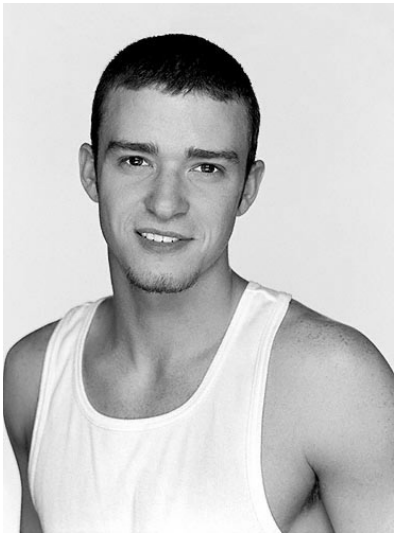
(no relation to Sound Projector regular Haco) grew up in Hawaii, performing in stage shows with her father, singer Don Ho, who had an international hit in the 60's with 'Tiny Bubbles'. Judging by the brief splurge of PR guff that appeared in the wake of this record, she seems to be have been attempting to follow a similar career path to fellow precocious performers Britney Spears or Cristina Aguilera, but I gather she didn't get any further than this one hit – either way, to me she comes across more like 80s poplets Debbie Gibson and Tiffany, in that they share early-teen-oriented lyrics and a squeaky clean image (Tiffany's eventual appearance in Playboy notwithstanding). Hoku also inherits their vocal mannerisms - her voice being decent enough but its charm is really down to the way it allows her personality (such as it is) to come across. Its husky edge also makes her sound slightly older and more world-wise than the cheated teen she plays in the song, a standard ploy for appealing to girls in their early teens.

This is a neat song either way, with an appealing arrangement based on an upfront but deliberately muffled electric piano intertwined with a great sequenced bass line and a bouncy, uplifting rhythm track. Listen closely to the way 'Another dumb blonde' is put together and you'll find it disproves the notion that modern pop arrangements are all formulaic and unimaginative. There's lots of different elements which all make small but essential contributions to the song – including boogie woogie piano, distorted power chord breaks, synth pulses, guitar jangles, lame-ass laser gun effects, and even some hilariously unthreatening scratching on what sounds like a toy turntable - and these are weaved together into a coherent if plastic-sounding whole which manages to be inventive without making a great big hoo-hah about it.

And unusually for modern pop, the writers took the time to write hooks for the verses as well as the chorus. The point of this song is that Hoku is determined to persuade us that she's not just 'another dumb blonde', and the clincher in her argument for me is the pair of middle 8s where she first switches to an unlikely Prince-style back-of-the-throat sneer, then adopts her best 'above it all' angelic falsetto to deliver the dismissive mantra 'that's alright, that's okay, I never loved you anyway' which continues over the song's memorable and lengthy fade out.

Slightly disturbing though is the vocoder voice which crops up from time-to-time to parrot snatches of her lyrics, as if she's got being followed round by a sycophantic and slightly stupid robot buddy. It got me imagining a little nephew of Metal Mickey appearing in a spin-off to Sabrina the Teenage Witch… another great TV show idea brought to you courtesy *The Sound Projector*.

HARLEY RICHARDSON



Justin Timberlake
Rock Your Body
UNITED KINGDOM JIVE 9254952
CD SINGLE (2003)

Entire forests have been wasted on column inches devoted to the incredible transformation of Justin T's from spindly boy band member and professional virgin to international sex symbol. Of course much of this elevation has been down to skilled management and a measure of good luck, even the ridiculous 'wardrobe malfunction' incident seeming to backfire more on Janet Jackson rather than Britney's ex. Moreover despite appearing everywhere he also doesn't even feel overexposed in the same way that Beyonce might do.

However the contribution of some killer singles should also not be underestimated. Whist the album, *Justified*, still suffers from a lot of flab, the success of 'Rock Your Body', 'Like I Love You', 'Cry me a River' and 'Senorita' cannot be attributed only to image. Whilst some plump for 'Cry Me A River' as being the best, with its fantastically unsubtle dig at Britney in the video, for this listener it strays too close to N-Sync material. 'Rock Your Body' is much better. It's a terrific, cheeky record. Elements of it are classic Michael Jackson, complete with the occasional MJ whoops. Its fat bassline and strummed guitars greet like you old friends and you wonder if you've actually heard this before. But this reassuring funkiness are parts of its appeal and you'll find yourself pleasingly transported to the disco. Even the lyrics are all about picking up partners on the dance floor.

Timberlake's vocal is excellent. He sounds both pleading and vulnerable ('Don't walk away'), as well as confident and sleazy ('Gonna have you naked by the end of this song'). An unobstrusive female hook line (think 'Gimme Shelter') works a treat and the final section of the song features a nearly acapella mixture of beats and grunts. This is quite unexpected and makes you want to play the song again, since you've been robbed of the luxury of a final hook and chorus.

'Rock Your Body' is produced and co-written by the in-fashion Neptunes, who make up two thirds of N.E.R.D. and have produced many hip-hop and R&B hits. This is a very successful example of where an artist with little credibility can use a very skilled production team to produce great results. *Sound Projector* allows its chest to spill out of its shirt in respect.

STEVE BYNGHALL

Madonna
Beautiful Stranger
UNITED KINGDOM MAVERICK
W495CD CD SINGLE (1999)

Along with Prince and Michael Jackson, Madonna used to be wheeled out as one of the big eighties superstars who 'survived'. However the substance of this seemed to be her iconic reputation and ability to reinvent herself, which as far as we're concerned amounts to little more than her working her way through the contents of a fancy dress store. As for her actual musical legacy, she has left us with some half-decent singles ('Into the Groove') rather than any great ones, her material being over-reliant on external producers and writers for its quality. Therefore it is a surprise when you hear 'Beautiful Stranger', the high point of her career and essentially a sixties pastiche created for a sixties pastiche film ('Austin Powers').

It's just a fantastic single – faux retro moog-like organs, cod but fun sixties-isms, jangly guitars that become chunky in just the right places, and modern pop beats with throwaway lyrics about a man 'being the devil in disguise'. There are also four distinct parts to this song, each with its own vocal or instrumental hook, so there's plenty to keep you interested, and the pay off line 'To know you is to love you' echoes around your head and then comes back for a second helping as the drums kick in, led by a delightful little wavy synth line.

This single also tries less hard than any other Madonna record to impress. The 'irony' of Austin Powers (evident in the 'Beautiful Stranger' video) seems to release Madonna from any need to be artistically or musically credible, and with the pressure off it allows her to deliver. Her subtle vibrato no longer sound pompous or out of place, just lovely. And whilst some may be uncomfortable with the cheesy Beatlesy hints of flute and harpsichord at the end, they can be no worse than say anything produced by Jeff Lynne.

And although Madonna inexplicably pronounces 'stranger' as if she's from the West Country, *Sound Projector* forgives her and spins the disc again.

STEVE BYNGHALL

Kylie Minogue
Love at First Sight
UNITED KINGDOM EMI
CRRS6577 CD SINGLE (2002)

Whilst the visual appeal of Kylie Minogue is easy to appreciate, it's harder to understand the plaudits routinely handed out to her recent disco pastiche music. We'll probably be hearing 'Can't Get You Out Of My Head' on our radios for a long time to come, but as far as we at The Sound Projector chart squad

are concerned, 'Love at First Sight' is the only true gem to emerge from Kylie's second coming.

A variation on that old disco track narrative - a night at a wild party - is sketched out here. As it starts you approach the venue, hearing the music getting louder and louder. Suddenly you're inside and strutting your stuff amongst gleaming-toothed people. A funky rhythm guitar chops away and a treated lead guitar line snakes off into the distance, evoking the dizzying, heightened feeling of being in an unfamiliar and exciting situation.

This mildly hallucinogenic atmosphere continues throughout. The lyric 'the stars came out and filled up the sky' is perfectly illustrated by an cleverly-layered arrangement which plays off languorous pools of synthesised sound against crystal clear notes picked out on, amongst other things, a harp. At 01:10 the track's producers (Richard Stannard and Julian Gallagher) suck all the treble out of the mix, a familiar dance music technique used to make the record sound like it's playing a different room. Only in this case it's a sleight of hand which catches us unawares when Kylie's voice suddenly emerges up close and intimate right at the front of the mix. If the idea is that you've just snuck away from the main party and found yourself alone in a closet with Miss Minogue, the producers cruelly wait just a few seconds before they throw open the doors and let the party back in, ruining your chance of a quick fumble.

This is a crafty update to the disco genre, which successfully incorporates modern ideas and production techniques. Kylie still sings like she has a second pair of nostrils at the back of her throat, but Stannard & Gallagher know just what to do with her voice, adding beautiful fluttering falsetto harmonies as counterpoint, picking out certain words for emphasis, and somehow making it sound just plain celestial. And as the track comes to a conclusion they tip their hats to their forebears via 'boop-boop' effects, a brief impersonation of Donna Summer in 'I feel love' mode, and the ghost of 70s disco singing through the ether.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

✸Boy Bands and Girl Groups✸

Five

Keep On Movin'

UNITED KINGDOM RCA / BMG 743217119027 CD SINGLE (1999)

Five were usually purveyors of Backstreet Boys / N-Sync American style boyband material, but 'Keep on Movin'' subverts the genre just enough to stand out. On first listen it is much more palatable than say 'Slam Dunk da Funk' – their dreadful debut single. The song structure is very simple, and although I haven't seen the guitar tabs, I reckon it's a three chord number with no difference between verse and chorus. It's a fantastic tune and although produced with some cheap boybandisms in the vocal direction, a lovely melodic guitar riff with some warm chiming gives it almost some alt. respectability. (Remember this was before the evil Busted were invented). I have actually heard this playing at a Belle and Sebastian themed club… and people were dancing.

'Keep on Movin'' comes with a great delivery. It's a positive message but dealt in a fresh, original, and frankly unsentimental way: 'Get on up, when you're down, take a good look around / I know it's not much but is OK, keep on movin' anyway'. In a genre saturated with empty statements is fantastic to hear somebody sing 'I know its not much but its OK.' The understatement works wonders in a genre not used to understatement. And the tune does literally 'keep on moving' - the melody running up and down the scales like a hyperactive kid cooped up indoors during the summer holidays. The repeated backing vocals towards the end keep up the momentum on this lovely single. A total surprise from the boys who recorded a frightening version of 'We will rock you'.

STEVE BYNGHALL

Destiny's Child

Independent Woman

UNITED KINGDOM COLUMBIA 6705935 CD SINGLE (2000)

When the Spice Girls proclaimed the arrival of 'Girl Power' they managed to hoodwink the nation into thinking they were both talented and foxy, even though Posh had a voice weedier than watery broth and Geri looked like Coronation Street's Rita Fairclough. The real *Girl Power* arrived several years later with Destiny's Child and the trio of singles – Independent Woman, Survivor and Bootylicious. While Baby, Scary & Co slapped the wrists of any man who dared get between them and their friends, Beyonce's women sang of financial and emotional independence, strength of character and the power of sexuality. The three singles open the *Survivor* album – tracks 1, 2 & 3 - and form a powerful and ballsy statement of intent. (Unfortunately the rest of the album is filler.) Better singers, better

songs, better performers and better looking than the Spice Girls, Destiny's Child are unlikely to top 'Independent Woman'.

The song is really a pop song with a strong R & B production and of course, the inevitable killer chorus. A twitchy shaker, a minimal but catchy guitar sample, and hard hitting beats settle you straight into the verse where Beyonce set outs her stall almost immediately: 'Question….tell me what you think about me, I've got my own diamonds and I've got my own rings…when it's over please get up and leave…' Then in the bridge to the chorus, sweetened by a synth strings line, the girls list all the things that they have bought themselves - the car, the watch, the house and - just before they begin to sound like they might be working for the QVC shopping channel – yell 'I depend on me!' This leads into the rush of the rousing, celebratory chorus, which calls for all 'the honeys making money' and other independent women to throw up their hands. The pay-off after the chorus 'Girl I didn't know you could get down like that…' prolongs the high and by this time you find that you have bought into Beyonce's vision of Girl Power.

The record was originally the theme for the *Charlie's Angels* movie, and this means that there are references to them all the way through the song. If anything these do take away slightly from the record. The novelty namecheck of the film's stars at the beginning is unnecessary, as is the frankly bizarre 'angel style' choir middle eight, and there is a certain irony (which may or may not be deliberate) in singing about 'independent' angels who ultimately belong to Charlie. At the same time there is also some relevance which just might have been dreamt up by some marketing executives: Three attractive women are singing about three attractive women, and sing about how much money they have made, whilst making vast amounts of money. These points aside, this is a really great record and well worth investigating.

STEVE BYNGHALL

B*Witched

B*Witched

UNITED KINGDOM EPIC/GLOW WORM CD 491704 2 (1998)

Of all the acts bigged up in Peter Bagge's bubblegum music article, B*Witched was the one I found most difficult to credit. The memory of this Irish foursome dancing their twee jigs on Top of the Pops back in the late 90s sends a cold shudder through me to this day.

But Mr B is right! With the perspective afforded by elapsed time, and the opportunity to download their tracks via the Internet (you're unlikely to hear them on the radio these days), it turns out that their songs are rather fine examples of 90s teen pop. What's that I hear, you knew it all along?

B*witched were one of many similar pop bands around at the time, but unlike their peers they weren't entirely manufactured; this foursome had been performing together since school (two of them are sisters), and for what its worth all of them were to-some-extent or other genuine musicians. One suspects though that they were bound for the Big Nowhere until an appearance on a television documentary brought them to the attention of Boyzone's managers. (It can't have hurt that the twins' elder brother was a member of said band).

The brains behind the band seems to have been their producer Ray 'Madman' Hedges – and try as I might I can't find any stories to explain that nickname. He thought they were a 'bewitching' foursome, hence the band's name. US alt-rocker Bob Bert had beaten them to the moniker by several years and when he discovered their plans to use it, he despatched his bovver-booted pal Julia Cafritz to Dublin to settle the matter on his behalf. After the girls lost the ensuing four-on-one catfight, the asterisk was introduced as a compromise. No matter, in B*Witched Hedges saw an opportunity to tap into two late-90s manias – Irishness and girl bands. Accordingly the LP begins with a snatch of ersatz pastoral ambience, then there's a cry of 'Get your caps…' and it's off into some flimsy off-the-shelf breakbeats, crassly juxtaposed with some fiddle playing. The concept is further played out in the cringemaking spoken quips ('What're you loik?') that obtrusively pepper the tracks. But the remaining fiddle sections (all played by one Daniel Collier) are actually pretty good and beyond that the Irish schtick is largely irrelevant to the record's appeal. I'd like to think that Timbaland was a big fan of this CD and that it inspired them to use fiddle samples in his productions for Bubba Sparxxx - B*witched were popular in the US, so this may not be as far fetched as it sounds.

Lead singer Edele Lynch has an unusually strong, rich and versatile voice for a member of teen pop band, and had no need of the usual electronic enhancements to get her message across. That said, she was guilty of several contemporary singing vices – she had a tendancy to bunch her vocal chords up and produce fleeting chipmunk impersonations, and to lapse into a mannered croakyness, suggesting that she entertained ambitions of being the next Shania Twain. The rest of the band were really there to fill out the sound, delivering some lovely ensemble harmonies (this time definitely electronically smoothed out and enhanced, and none the worse for it), as well as providing the camaraderie expected of post-Spice Girls groups. This is all fine and good on record – but the sleeve notes where each member of the band prattles on cloyingly about the importance of love, friendship, self-belief, grandparents, kittens, and God must've had even their fans reaching for the sick bag!

Ray Hedges also produced Boyzone, a boy band who specialised in extremely schmaltzy ballads whose appeal was unfathomable to anyone lacking a receptive set of hormones – in contrast, B*witched did have something to offer to people outside their direct target audience. They were pitched mainly at girls who were just old enough to be going out and meeting boys for the first time, and hence were marketed, initially at least, as tomboys rather than sex kittens. Most of the lyrics describe puppy love in one way or another, even though the mid-teens in B*Witched were a little old to carry off lines like 'I've got a house with windows and doors / I'll show you mine if you show me yours'. Either way, you really don't have to be a teenage girl to appreciate the energy, optimism and enthusiasm that's captured (or perhaps synthesised) both musically and lyrically in hits like 'C'est La Vie' and 'Rollercoaster'. And whilst the band's wholesomeness and unwillingness to say bad things about anybody or anything would normally be nauseating, here it makes a refreshing change from the loud-mouthed and self-obsessed personas of their contemporaries.

The songs were put together in Hedges' studio (his so-called 'mothership', on loan from George Clinton) and they have a bright, uncluttered sound, plus handclaps, always a good thing. It sounds like everyone was enjoying themselves putting the tracks together and although Hedges works within some fairly narrow limits, he still leaves scope for some decent musical ideas to get through. 'Rollercoaster' is my favourite track, from the chunky fairground organ intro to Erwin Keiles' gorgeous rolling guitar break that shadows the chord changes. And I love the way that Hedges holds back one key harmony part to the end, when it turns an already good chorus into a really great one. In true bubblegum spirit, the material's unapologetic cheesiness is a big part of its appeal, and B*Witched carry off things that more serious bands would be too scared to try: 'C'est La Vie' has the girls ape a ridiculous keyboard line, shamelessly rhymes 'C'est' with 'say', and throws in a kitchen sink's worth of meaningless calls to action ('Hey Hey', 'Oh Oh', 'Hup Hup', 'Hey Hey Hey', 'Na-na-na-hey') where one would normally be enough.

Unfortunately Hedges and his cohorts couldn't sustain this level of exuberance for a whole CD, so it's padded out with a bunch of lightweight and unthreatening versions of stuff that was hip in the music world at the time. Actually these aren't that bad if you're in a charitable mood, and I am. A consecutive pair of tracks outdo Alanis Morisette and Natalie Imbruglia at their own games. Another makes merry heck with the riff from 'Venus'. The finale is a successful and completely over-the-top answer to 'Please Mr Postman' in the style of ELO.

This record doubles as a greatest hits by default, the B*Witched phenomenon fizzling out after a lacklustre follow-up. 'We four girls are here to stay' they sang, but in 2000 they decided to 'take a rest', and four years later there's no sign of a return. Reports that they were seen mysteriously wriggling their noses shortly before vanishing in puffs of smoke have yet to be confirmed.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

Len
Steal my sunshine
COLUMBIA CD SINGLE 668506-5
(1999)

Let me take you back to the Autumn of 1999, when work had taken me to Milan. With the best part of a week stretching before me I made it my duty on arrival to check out the choices on the hotel's cable telly. Apart from the multiple hardcore porn channels so beloved of Catholic countries there were a couple of local music channels. I held this truth to be evident – everyone knows the only countries that do pop well are the UK, USA and, well, Sweden. The chances of me hearing anything good on an Italian national station focussed on the Italian charts was remote. Pretty much the first thing I saw and heard was this irritating Europop number called 'Steal My Sunshine' by a band named Len, which was in English but sung in that slightly strangulated way that suggests English isn't the singers' native tongue. Every evening I'd flip on the telly and think Oh, will they play 'Steal My Sunshine' again? I laughed myself

silly, waited for it in order that I could do so. After a week I left Italy thinking I was shutting the door on Len, feeling desperately reinforced in my lofty status as a music lover from a land of superior pop. The song was so stupid, so worthlessly trashy and Europoppy, so absolutely ridiculously bereft of any value, that I was completely unable to get it out of my head. The day after stepping off the plane home I knew I had to put myself out of my misery and buy the CD single as quickly as possible. The first couple of shops I tried didn't have it, then a rising panic set in as nowhere in the West End had even heard of it or had any record of it. I feared I'd dreamt the whole thing. I tried to search for it online but was staggered to find no trace of it. After a fortnight the memory began to fade and I could no longer hear it in my head. By this time I was fearing for my sanity. But it's the human lot to bear such pain and longing, and after a couple of months it wasn't the first thing I thought of on waking in the mornings, and I recognised it didn't hurt quite so much. Then suddenly (what felt like an age later) out of the blue I heard 'Steal My Sunshine' on UK radio and went absofuckinglutely crazyapeshit bonkers. Two weeks later there it was, CD single in my hand, and Len in the charts. Turns out they're Canadian after all, nothing to do with Europop per se. It didn't even occur to me to buy the album, which came and went in a damp squib of non-publicity.

So what type of band *are* Len? If you go by the awful cartoon on the record's sleeve you'd take them to be a bunch of obnoxious teen hipster archetypes straight out of a Jamie Hewlitt comic strip. But the music paints a different picture, casting them as a likeable bunch of stoner-slacker skate-kids hanging out their summer holidays (Kevin Smith's entertaining *Mallrats* movie is a more apt cultural reference if you want one).

The CD single confusingly only has the 'album edit' which suffers from the loss of some fun scene-setting chat between the band members. (If you want the 'single edit' presumably you've got to buy the album?) But it's a brilliantly fluid number whose underlying hop-skip piano refrain should have you nodding your head and tapping your foot from start to finish, ideally while speeding down a coast road with the roof down. There's a breezy breathy female vocal which chimes in for the response-refrain 'If you steal my sunshine' on the chorus which still makes me tingle. The track weds the ticks of hip-hop to a pure pop sensibility, that bit *shmoover* than (for example) De La Soul, less uptight than the Red Hot Chili Peppers. The lyrics propel the song and are gloriously daft, but glorious. If you've not heard the song then 'Now the fuzzy stare from not being there on a confusing morning week / Impaired my tribal lunar-speak' or 'My sticky paws were into making straws out of big fat slurpy treats / An incredible eight-foot heap' won't yet mean much to you, but the way the main-man sings it you want to give him a big hug like your two year old nephew's just done something ultra-cute. It's the sound of the summer, wherever and whenever you hear it.

Turns out it *was* actually too good to be true, or too good to be new – the main loop is actually a sample. I shouldn't let myself be ambushed again and again this way: most of the best pop-song hooks are samples, that's the point. But I did feel a little cheated, disappointed with myself as much as with them. This sample was from the late 70's disco classic 'More, More, More' by Andrea True Station - you know, the one used on a thousand chic adverts or 'Sex in the City' trailers. (For this track itself I'd recommend the excellent soundtrack to Whit Stillman's sublime *Last Days of Disco*). As for Len themselves – never heard of them again. I wish them well and hope they're happy, but I don't expect another 'Steal My Sunshine'. I'll always have Milan.

JANSON HARRISON

S Club 7
S Club Party
UNITED KINGDOM POLYDOR 5614182 CD SINGLE (1999)

S Club 7 have pretty much followed the standard trajectory of most modern manufactured bands – release three albums, have at least one half-decent single, have one member quit and then split shortly afterwards. Although they memory is now heavily soiled by the truly disturbing S Club Juniors (now S Club 8), the troupe leave behind fonder memories than most due to two genius moments. One of these is the office party anthem 'Don't Stop Movin'', and the other is the truly sublime 'S Club Party', their second single and a brilliant, fun piece of inspired self-mythologising pop funk.

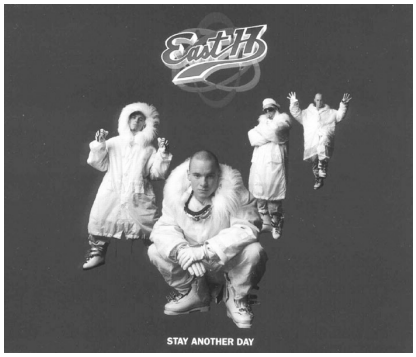
By releasing a song which namechecks themselves, S Club immediately ramp up the stakes and gamble their reputation on one track. The young record buying public is never going to want to go an 'S Club Party', let alone buy any of their records again, if it sounds dull and lifeless. But they pull it off (and therefore get double the points) with the sounds of boys and girls at a party, chanting, whoops, and a relaxed and self-assured bass-heavy groove which ensures that at least somebody will be dancing. The sound of record scratching and a crescendo of whoops take you straight into the emphatic 'S Club' chorus which is sung by the girls of the group with little harmonising – a move which strengthens the tune and enhances the advice from the boys that there 'ain't no party like an S Club Party'. Strangely the girls sound very English here and the boys sound like they're trying to be American.

After the second effortlessly-catchy chorus the S Club namecheck their members: 'Tina's doing her dance, John's looking for romance, Paul's getting down on the floor, while Hannah's screaming out for more. Wanna see Bradley swing, wanna see Rachel do her thing, then we got Jo, she's got the flow…'

Leaving their three most important members until last, it feels like a knowing comment on the relative importance of individuals to the S Club brand. So we end with references to the one with personality (Bradley), the good looking one (Rachel) and the one who can sing (Jo). Ironically it is Hannah who appears to have the most promising career with her acting role in *Spy Kids 2*, whilst Rachel Stevens has returned to recording songs for the under-fives with a cover of 'More More More'.

However the whole thing sounds so self-assured, so catchy and poppy (and without the irritating treble of euro hits) that they all sound like stars. Finally on the fade there's a few Spice Girl-isms in Jo and Bradley's vocal gymnastics. Overall it's a confident and likeable anthem with a killer chorus. S-clubtastic.

STEVE BYNGHALL



East 17
Stay another day
UNITED KINGDOM LONDON RECORDINGS LONDCD 354 CD SINGLE (1994)

One of the great break-up songs of all time and also a rare Xmas number one that's worth your ear-time. East 17, named after the postcode of Walthamstow, the North-East London borough from which they hailed, were a sort of Take That for rough girls, armed with aggressive and shouty tunes and known to indulge in some very poor white boy rapping.

This however is a ballad. The occasional slower-paced number is of course a standard ploy for many pop acts, but usually little more than a change of pace aimed at keeping the fans from getting bored. But this is East 17's best number by far, and the only song to justify band member Tony Mortimer's dubious reputation as a songwriter. The sleeve

helpfully points out that Stay Another Day = SAD, just in case we hadn't picked up on the mood of the song, and I wonder if Jad Fair was on hand when the actually very good remixes were named 'Less Sad', 'More Sad' and 'Not So Sad'?

The weaknesses in lead singer Brian Harvey's tremulous voice stands fully exposed as he attempts to convince his girlfriend not to leave him, or at least to stick around for a few hours more – he sounds like he's on the edge of bursting into tears throughout, or maybe he's just embarrassed about singing a sissy song. This does not make for technically great singing but somehow sounds more convincing and heartfelt than if a more polished and able singer had attempted the same material. The 'stay now' refrain is excessively and awkwardly shoehorned into the song at every possible opportunity, which just adds to the general sense of desperation. The only chart equivalent we can think of is 'Please Don't Go', KC & The Sunshine Band's great song on the same theme.

The arrangement is on paper very sentimental and corny: synth washes, pizzicato strings, impressionistic Elton-John-style piano chords and ominous cymbal / thunder crashes at key moments. But from the swooning rush of the opening moments, when the band members' voices mass into a surprisingly beautiful falsetto, the song rises above its meagre ingredients, the strong tune somehow justifying the overblown orchestration. As it progresses it gathers intensity, the piano playing and string-plucking getting more agitated and straying ever-farther from the root notes, leading up to a climatic finale with possibly the best use of bells in a song since Pierre Henry. We reckon these were included with an ear to the Xmas market, but either way they evoke not only Christmases but weddings and heightened emotions all round, thereby hinting at reconciliation for our lovestruck homeboys… well how could anyone resist a tune like this? Elegaic stuff and genuinely romantic.

HARLEY RICHARDSON / JANSON HARRISON

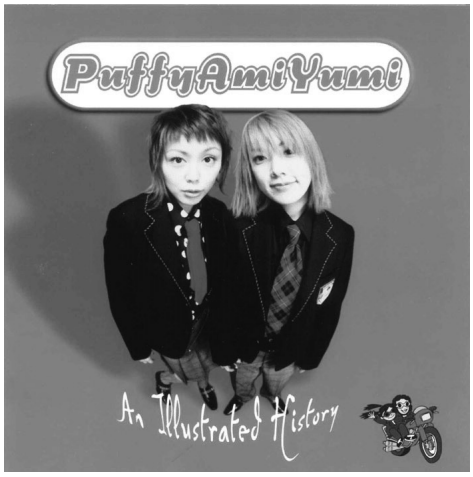
Puffy Amiyumi

An Illustrated History

BAR/NONE RECORDS BRN-CD-128
CD (2002)

Way back in 1995 Ami Onuki and Yumi Yoshimara, two Japanese teenagers living in different cities and unaware of each other's existence, were inspired by a series of high profile talent competitions to find out if they had what it took to be famous pop stars. Their audition tapes came to the attention of a bright spark at Sony who liked what he heard and thought that Ami and Yumi would work well as a duo.

It seems he was right as Puffy became a Spice-Girls style phenomenon in Japan, generating not only a stack of pop records but teenage fashions, a TV show ('Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa-Puffy'), action figures and God knows what other sorts of related merchandise. And it turns out they've got more staying power than Geri



& co - they're still performing together some 9 years later.

Known simply as Puffy in their homeland, they tag on 'Amiyumi' (a composite of their forenames) during their sojourns to the West, to avoid being mistaken (as if!) for a certain fur-wearing cigar-chomping gansta rapper. They're well respected by lots of hip people: their *Puffy PRMX* CD features remixes by Yoko Ono, DJ Shadow, Thurston Moore, Otomo Yoshihide, Pierre Henry and Masonna amongst others. I'm kidding, but only just… Malcolm Maclaren and Pizzicato 5 are amongst their actual heavyweight collaborators on the record.

But from this record it's not entirely clear what they've done to deserve this attention. True, they bear little resemblance to any girl band we're aware of: the closest the West have got (in terms of brassy spirit if nothing else) is probably Daphne and Celeste; or maybe the retro rock'n'electronica of Girls Aloud. But that's stretching it some – for a more accurate picture imagine a Japanese pop act trying to recreate British and American hits from the 60s and 70s and you'll probably be not far from the mark.

Each Puffy song recreates a genre (eg disco, rock'n'roll, samba), the work of a pop act (the Beatles or Abba), or even a particular song ('You Can't Hurry Love') from the Western rock/pop music canon. They're not limited to mainstream material either - perhaps the most unlikely example here is a cruise ship tune that could be straight from the pen of Van Dyke Parks. But pretty much every melody, rhythm and drum beat on this record is likely to be familiar to you, even if you can't quite place where from.

Puffy work with rock musicians rather than the dance producers or DJs more usually associated, in the West at least, with latterday pop. The two most important collaborators seem to be Tamio Okuda (of the Japanese rock group, Unicorn) and Andy Sturmer (known to American alt-rock fans as a member of Jellyfish). The attention to detail is undeniably impressive – for instance, in the Beatles tribute 'That's the way it is', we get a spot-on recreation of the early Fab Four guitar and drums sound, with vocals and riffs cribbed from at least three different Beatles songs, and even a pretty accurate reproduction of Ringo's unique drumming 'technique'. But whilst it would be nice to think the end product was some kind of pop equivalent of The Residents' *Third Reich'n'Roll*, it often sounds more like those musical parodies in *The Simpsons* - a note or two is tweaked, or the melody is played backwards, leaving the song recognisable yet beyond the reach of lawyers.

What stops this from being 100% pastiche is the Puffy girls' lively and vibrant vocals which often go off in a completely different direction to the source material, especially in the choruses, and make me imagine a jaunty stroll along a Tokyo street where I get to say hello to lots of interesting characters. But whilst this means their songs make a more attractive prospect than, say, modern British indie bands stealing from rock music of the 70s, they're still kinda lightweight and pointless – there's just not enough of substance added in the process. The only one of their 'tributes' that I'd recommend unreservedly is 'Jet Police', essentially The Who's epic 'Won't Get Fooled Again' compressed down to a 3 minute pop song. They don't change this track much either, but the producer's obvious love of the original feeds into a vigorous attack on the song, achieving an intensity of execution only matched by Bongwater's great cover of The Monkees' 'You Just May Be The One'. And a pleasing and novel touch is the apt guest appearance of George Martin's trained psychedelic seagulls, last heard on 'Tomorrow Never Knows'.

I'm assuming, perhaps unfairly, that this record is representative of their work. *An Illustrated History* was put together to introduce Puffy to a western audience, so it's possible the compilers decided to give us the material that they thought would be most familiar-sounding and unthreatening to our soft foreign ears. On the other hand, whoever masterminded their attack on the American market must've realised that Puffy's brand of retro music was unlikely to cut it against the more modern sounding likes of Britney and co. So the stakes were raised and an attempt made to compete rather than imitate. Hence the Andy Sturmer-written single 'Love so Pure', the reason I bought this CD.

This features all Puffy's best moves distilled into a single song, and also brilliantly ties together a bunch of loose threads left hanging and undeveloped by 80's and 90s guitar pop. There's a light sprinkling of oriental melody over the opening jingle-jangle guitar riff, but from then on it's western power pop all the way, with echoes of British flower-psyche band The Primitives and a brilliant Jesus and Mary Chain surf guitar riff amongst the almost-quotations from the past. The sleeve notes give The Pooh Sticks as a reference point, but for me the larger-than-life, yet ragged and spontaneous feel to the arrangement reminds me of The Pastels at their most visionary and exhuberant (say 'Zoom')… just check out the rinky-dinky glockenspiel adorning the song towards the end. In fact, 'Love so pure' has all the charm of a back garden fireworks display, with mini-rockets whooshing off all over the place. And whilst it sounds like there's something missing

from the chorus the first time you hear it, this turns out to be a deliberate tension-builder: Sturmer waits till about half way through before pulling out the missing piece of the picture, a second version of the 'Love so pure' hook which acts as an emphatic restatement of everything said so far and makes the song's ending truly unforgettable.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

✷Dance pop✷

Whigfield
Saturday Night
UNITED KINGDOM SYSTEMATIC
SYSCD3 CD SINGLE (1994)

For many this song conjures up images of embarrassing formation dancing at weddings, but it's actually a thoroughly great record. True, it isn't that out-of-place amongst earlier chart/house crossover hits such as 'French Kiss' by 'Lil Louis, or anything with that familiar Italian nineties piano refrain. However 'Saturday Night' has a song structure, and a euro-pop rather than a dance sensibility, the result being that the hook doesn't get tired through over-repetition.

Born in Denmark, Whigfield (known to friends and family as Sannie Carlson) was portrayed in the media as being rather moody and unwilling to smile for the cameras, in contrast to the sunny outlook of her material. 'Saturday Night' was her debut (and only UK hit) single but since the mid-nineties she has released four CDs, entitled *Whigfield I* to *Whigfield 4*. (At this point, Sound Projector decides not to explore any further possible similarities between Whigfield and Scott Walker). The single was produced by Larry Pignagnoli, an Italian producer of various Euro-pop hits by acts such as Spagna, some of which have graced the UK charts.

What makes 'Saturday Night' such a great record is its simplicity and its restraint, a welcome relief from modern Euro-hits awash with epic ambient synths and relentlessy fussy beats. The song is built around a repetitive chord sequence and melody - the rhythm and synths gradually build up as it develops and the piano comes in about a third of the way through the record. The vocals are equally simple, with just some restrained harmonies fleshing them out at the end. To be fair Whigfield was probably picked for her looks rather than her vocal talents (she started her career as a model rather than a singer), but it's still a charming vocal performance, helped by the slight Scandinavian intonation in her singing and lyrics that were clearly *not* written by an English native speaker - 'Its party time and not one minute we can lose, be my baby'.

If some of the synth sounds were changed to locate them in the eighties rather than nineties and Whigfield was replaced by a teutonic robotic voice, Saturday Night would be regarded as a fantastic and ironically-tinged piece of technopop. In fact if you listen to a couple of Kraftwerk's remixes there are moments which aren't that far removed from 'Saturday Night'. Whilst writing this I am now listening to it probably for the fourteenth time in a row, and it's still isn't losing its charm. Now how do you do that formation dance again?

STEVE BYNGHALL

Snap
Welcome to Tomorrow (Are you ready?)
UNITED KINGDOM ARISTA / BMG
74321 223857 7" SINGLE (1994)

Snap (aka German DJs Michael Muenzing and Luca Anzilotti) were one of the highest profile dance acts of the early 1990s, combining strident and aggressive electronica with powerful vocals in a string of memorable and larger-than-life hits including 'The Power', 'Exterminate' and 'Rhythm is a Dancer'. That said, I'm not a fan - those tracks are a bit empty and bombastic for my liking. But their 1994 hit 'Welcome to Tomorrow' is another matter.

It sounds nothing like their previous records or any other dance pop tunes of the time. The thing that immediately sets it apart is how subdued the drums are – instead of the expected in-your-face pounding beat, they're hardly there at all for much of the track and when they do kick in they're way back in the mix. The song's impetus comes instead from the bass line, a beautiful drawn-out circular sequence of three chords played on a default synthesiser setting, and layer-upon-layer of restless sequenced keyboard arpeggios. This low-key approach seemed to confound the public on its release. The record shot straight into the top 5 on the back of the band's previous successes (not to mention a very expensive video set in outer space) but once people got to hear it, it disappeared into oblivion almost as quickly.

I only saw the aforementioned video once, but now I've got its sci-fi theme firmly fixed in my head and I'm convinced, rightly or wrongly, that the whole track is intended to be a depiction of a journey through space. Listen and tell me if you agree: the Starship Snap putters gently through the universe on impulse drive, and we join it as the crew are gently woken up from suspended animation to stretch their legs. The sequencers squirreling away in the background represent the ship's instruments, the occasional pitter-patter of the snare drum doubles as a blast on the ship's rockets whilst a minor correction is made to the flight path. And as the track winds down to its conclusion, the instruments shut off one-by-one and the crew return to hibernation.

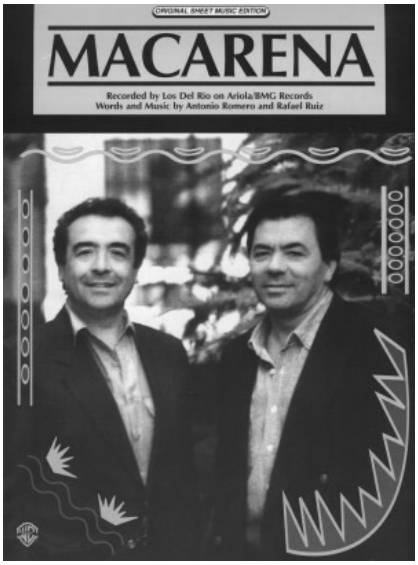
Once you're thinking along these lines, it's also possible to imagine that the song's vocals are not the vacuous ecstasy-inspired sentiments that they at first appear to be - instead they're describing an exotic encounter with a pair of Space Sirens. The video features two women but I believe that just one of them, Summer (the stage name of Paula Brown, an American session dancer and singer), handles both parts on the record. And it's hard to avoid being seduced by her warm and reassuring falsetto as she sings 'Welcome to tomorrow' and tempts the listener to come 'into my world'.

However from the listener's point of view it's not clear what exactly these Sirens have to offer. They repeatedly ask 'Are you ready?' for the future in question, but, like estate agents, they're short on the relevant details: 'Welcome into my house / Come along and follow me / to a place that you've never been / a mystic fantasy'. Their message is somewhat clumsily expressed in places, as if their humanoid façade is slipping and they're struggling with the language 'I'll show you things that you never knew existed in another place' - nothing to do with Snap being German of course! And that's as far as I can stretch this line of thought, since whoever wrote the lyrics lost interest at this point, resorting to a lame final verse: 'Hocus pocus turn around / ain't no magic at the ground', a lyric which wouldn't be out of place in a skipping song. But it's too late, I'm won over and I'm joining the Snap girls on their trip to Tomorrow, whatever or wherever it is.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

Los Del Rio
Macarena
UNITED KINGDOM RCA/BMG
74321 345372 CD SINGLE (1995)

'Macarena' may prove to be the most controversial record featured here, judging by the reactions I've had whilst discussing this article with friends and colleagues. 'You've got to be kidding' has been the most common response and this sentiment is borne out by regular appearances for the song in 'worst pop hits ever' charts, where it usually sits alongside such musical atrocities as 'The Birdie Song' and 'Agadoo'. Yet it's hard to get anyone to say exactly what is so bad about it. True it's catchy, it's a novelty hit - but surely catchyness is a good thing, and thank the good lord for the odd bit of novelty. The more substantial objections tend to be political in nature and involve complaints about the song's depiction of two old men letching over a young woman (the Macarena of the title). However I think that's actually a thinly disguised ageism at work, a case of selective political correctness – it's instructive to note



that it's often the same people who complain about the dominance of beauty and youth in the charts that are the first to throw up their arms in horror at the idea of two 'fat old men' having a hit with this song.

The two old fellers in question are Spaniards Antonio Romeo Monge and Rafael Ruiz, aka Los Del Rio ('Those of Rio' if you speak the lingo), a duo who had been releasing regionally successful flamenco-pop since the 60s, before they struck the international big time with this song. 'The Macarena' first surfaced in 1993 but LDR would release at least four iterations of the tune over the next few years and a rival version would also be put together by the similarly named Los del Mar ('Those of the sea'). The song was inspired by an awed encounter with a flamenco dancer, Diana Patricia Cubillan, but I think it's safe to assume that she wasn't doing the Macerana dance when Cupid's arrows struck the Los Del Rio boys. As you'll know, the accompanying line dance is so simple that anyone can take part, and several dance instructors in Venezuela now proudly proclaim on their websites that they invented it, although American choreographer named Mia Frye is also credited with adapting it from a Cuban dance known as 'El Mozambique'. There's a rumour that it became a cruise ship staple during the mid-nineties and that this led to the slow word-of-mouth dissemination of the song around the world, in what these days would be called viral marketing. This may or may not be true, but reading between the lines it also required a remix, a video and the addition of an English language verse for the song to really take off worldwide. The version we know in the UK was reworked by the Bayside Boys (although this in turn was based on the so-called 'Fangoria River Fe-Mix', to confuse matters further) and I'm guessing that they pared the song down to its best elements - check out the other mixes on this CD to hear some of the verses which were excised (they're fun but no big loss).

The basis of the song's appeal to me (and the aspect that seems to wind most people up) is the unforgettable refrain – the melody gently bobs up and down in a very pleasing way that is complemented perfectly by the charming and understated delivery of Romero and Ruiz. They sound like consummate gentlemen which I think is an important factor in 'selling' the ostensibly sleazy content of the song to the listener. But I also love the song's minimal yet bonkers arrangement. What crazed mind came up with the following combination of musical elements? A bass line punched out by a ticker tape sequencer; Chip'n'Dale muttering Macarena's name to themselves; chop-socky keyboard breaks; pre-Ali G shouts of 'aaaiiy'; and that guy wailing away in the background as if his foot has been crushed by one of Macarena's stilettos.

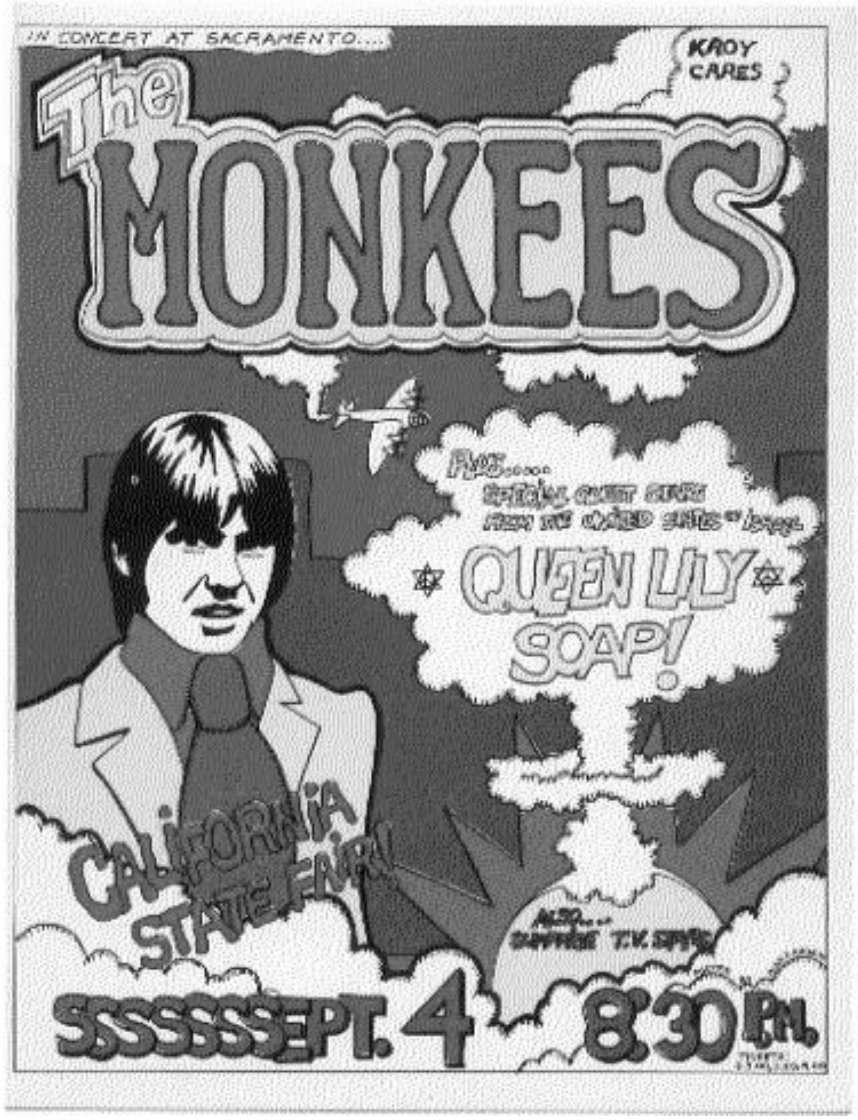
The English language section was, as I mentioned, added for the remix, but it remains true to the spirit of the original lyrics, and perhaps even makes the song complete, as it allows Macarena to put her side of the story across, in what has got to be one of the filthiest, most mischievous deliveries of a lyric in pop music. Who is the woman who sang this and where is she now? No one knows, and The Bayside Boys won't answer my calls.

As for the song's lyrics, the PC interpretation would have you believe that 'The Macarena' is a straightforward case of inter-generational sexism, but it's not as clear-cut as that. Consider the scenario depicted on record: Macarena's no-good boyfriend Vitorino is away doing military service, so she's taking the opportunity to sleep with his friends and flirt with everyone in sight, sending out mixed messages all the while: 'They all want me / can't have me', 'Now don't you worry about my boyfriend…', etc. Meanwhile Los Del Rios act as narrators, warning potential suitors what they can expect from Macarena (possibly from personal experience) whilst at the same time egging her on. Their chorus roughly translates as: 'Give your body pleasure, Macarena / Because your body is for giving pleasure and good things' – a positive message you'll agree and no doubt one all you Sound Projector readers live by. To see the song performed adds a further perspective, with LDR playing middle-aged businessmen who are themselves trying to get lucky with Macarena, but know they don't really have a chance – she isn't going to indulge them but plainly enjoys toying with their attentions. The implication is that it's all a game in which everyone is enjoying playing their parts. I'm not going to make any claims about this being deep or, say, empowering for women, but it is an appealing and light-hearted take on something that rightly or wrongly goes on every day all around the world, and is certainly a reasonable topic for a song. I suspect what's missing for some listeners is any moral standpoint (in particular, condemnation). Instead the song just presents the scenario and allows us to make up our own minds about it, a much more healthy approach as far as we're concerned. And you might be interested to know that the main character shares her name with a famous statue of the Virgin Mary, La Virgin de la Macarena, located in an area of Seville previously known as Macario. Perhaps our Roman Catholic readers could tell us whether this would be a deliberate act of blasphemy on Los Del Rio's part or just a example of harmless Latin irreverance?

Either way, as far as I'm concerned, 'The Macarena' is a great song. Of course there's no need to buy this record to hear it – just put on a suit and tie and head straight to the nearest wedding reception.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

A Monkee is not just a Boy



I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS ABOUT THE MONKEES. They seem to bring out the worst in people…how they hate 'manufactured' bands, how they hate teeny-bopper pop music. Why such hostility? What's not to like?

BBC Television had another pop at The Monkees last summer, in a clips show named *Teenage Kicks – The Story of the Boy Band.* It was a light-hearted look at the history of boy bands, focusing on big-business showbiz combos such as Westlife, Boyzone, and their historical forebears. All boy pop bands are fakes, manufactured by experts, was the premise. The successful boy bands know this, and accept their fate. They allow their managers to take control, and that way everyone's happy. The Monkees did not do this, therefore The Monkees were failures.

The show repeated the oft-told tale of The Monkees rebelling against their mentor and musical supervisor Don Kirshner after the completion of two phenomenally successful pop LPs. The Monkees famously played barely a note of music on these LPs, which were largely products of the Brill Building factory and studio session players; The Monkees added vocals only, in some cases to ready-made songs purchased complete with musical backdrops. The implication of the show was that by and large, this is the 'correct' way to make pop LPs. But the Monkees were not satisfied; they wanted to create their own music and went on to make the *Headquarters* LP, on which they famously played every single note of music.

In doing so, it was argued, they became the first manufactured band to commit an egotistic error of judgement which has been repeated by countless other manufactured groups since. A dreadful excerpt from *Headquarters* illustrated the folly of their move, revealing them to be a bunch of talentless jokers who, when left to their own devices, could do no more than goof around aimlessly in the studio like a bunch of low-rent improvisers on a bad day. Kirshner was wheeled out to claim (bitterly) that if only they'd listened to him things would've been different, and big name producer Pete Waterman provided a modern perspective, sagely declaring of The Monkees' own material 'it was crap, wasn't it?'

And if we didn't know any better we might just agree, but the facts of the *Headquarters* story are somewhat different to those presented in the show. As anyone who is familiar with the LP will know, the aforementioned excerpt was in fact a looped fragment from the intro to 'Band 6', an admittedly throwaway self-parodying atmosphere-setter which takes up but a few seconds of the record. Whatever you think of *Headquarters* (and we like it a lot), the excerpt is utterly unrepresentative of the record as a whole.

No surprise then to find the name of Stuart Maconie, cultural commentator and master of the glib, heading the programme's writing credits. I don't imagine for a second that Maconie really has it in for *Headquarters* – it most likely formed a convenient peg on which to hang his argument. But I'm not sure which is worse – his casual disregard for history or the contempt shown to the audience in assuming we either 1) wouldn't spot what he was saying was untrue or 2) wouldn't care either way.

That aside, his analysis of events stinks too - it's very convenient to concoct a nice, tidy linear 'history' of boy bands, and propose The Monkees as early exemplars of same. But this

is a huge mistake. The *Secret History* show looks at the current scene, and judges history by the same yardstick; today's boy bands are openly manufactured, the pop business is transparent in its manipulation of the talent and the marketplace, and all decisions informed by outright cynical belief that the audience are saps anyway. This is how it is now; Maconie's argument assumes it was *always* that way.

It's easy to forget how comparatively innocent things were in the 1960s, when The Monkees were being manufactured as a TV-based band and an answer to The Beatles. US executives thought they could pull this off, spotting a large money-making opportunity. But this was the early 1960s, and the rule book hadn't been written; nothing like this had been done before. The Monkees were recruited, not from a pool of faceless wannabes, but from a talent-show sifting process; their personalities and the chemistry between them were important factors in their selection, but the result was nevertheless four young men who actually had some acting and singing ability, and even a modicum of musical talent. Their CVs at that point would have been impressive when compared to, say, *Pop Idol* winners: Peter Tork was a Greenwich village folk guitarist, Mike Nesmith an experienced session musician and member of several bands, Davy Jones a young jockey and stage performer, and Micky Dolenz ex-star of the 'Corky the Circus Boy' TV show.

Even then it took considerable foresight to promote The Monkees through the medium of television, rather than exclusively through the accepted and proven successful route of hit singles. Hence Bob Rafelson & Bob Schneider's TV show concept, which worked like a charm (that's the first place any of us heard of Monkees in the UK).

You can make what you will of The Monkees' decision to leave Kirshner and strike out on their own. A more thoughtful and reasoned argument than Maconie's is set out in 'Good Clean Fun', pp 75-79 in the book *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth*. Here, the well-informed authors Carl Cafarelli and Gary Pig Gold weigh the pros and cons of the music made before and after *Headquarters*; but never once are they so callous as to suggest they 'ruined' a good money-making scheme, as Maconie does. Nor do they say that an aspiration to 'musicianship' is a bad thing.

◆A Headquarters in a Box

This nasty piece of journalism did get us at The Sound Projector thinking again about what a remarkable achievement *Headquarters* is. And we're not just talking from a high-minded artistic viewpoint – even in business terms *Headquarters* was a huge success, spending 11 weeks as the Billboard no 2 album (kept off the top spot by *Sgt Pepper* no less) and featuring three of The Monkees' most popular tracks ('You Just May Be the One', 'For Pete's Sake', and 'Randy Scouse Git').

So what is it that makes *Headquarters* so special? To understand this, we first of all need to consider the circumstances in which the album was made. As mentioned above, early Monkees songs were put together with little involvement from the band – the boys were (grudgingly) granted an early tryout in the studio but the discipline required to put a record together was beyond them at that stage and recording sessions turned into chaotic scenes straight out of their TV show. But when the show took off in a big way, the band suddenly found themselves in a very powerful position, at the same time as being on the receiving end of heavy criticism within the music industry for their lack of 'authenticity'. At least two members of the band (Nesmith and Tork) were also highly ambitious and frustrated with seeing their name connected with music made by other people. So when Don Kirshner released the *More of the Monkees* LP without consulting the band, this got him the sack and the Monkees the go-ahead to perform their own material. At this point the amazing thing to modern minds is that rather than recruit a replacement for Kirshner, Screen Gems allowed the Monkees to make their next album with little or no corporate interference.

Which meant that they had to come up with

the goods. And although it would be easy to be cynical about their claims to have played all the music on *Headquarters*, there's more than enough documentary evidence to prove that's exactly what they did (albeit with some help on bass from Chip Taylor of the Turtles and some minor contributions from session musicians).

What talents were at their disposal? For me, 80% of The Monkees' appeal is in their voices. Three of the four band members (Dolenz, Jones and Nesmith) could carry a tune, and each had a distinctive delivery, meaning that the band as a whole could handle a wide range of material. When I saw them live at Wembley in 2002, it was the voice of Micky Dolenz, coming from a dot on the stage, that amazed me. There, in the flesh, was an authentic Monkee; his voice was his fingerprint. Yet it's also often overlooked that their voices worked well in combination, and that they had a gift for simple yet inventive and memorable harmonies.

What about their talents as musicians? At the beginning Tork and Nesmith were the only real skilled musos in the band, although Mickey Dolenz learnt to drum in a crude fashion upon joining the band, and Davy Jones could of course winningly bash a tambourine. But by the time of *Headquarters* they had played their own instruments very publicly during several high profile live tours, a gutsy move in which they, by all accounts, developed into a surprisingly competent and tight garage-style band.

As for material, they were contractually restricted to playing songs owned by Colgems, the publishing arm of Screen Gems. Fortuitously, compositions by the band were covered under this agreement, and although Nesmith was the main songwriter, his talent seemed to rub off on Tork and Dolenz who both contributed excellent tracks ('For Pete's Sake' and 'Randy Scouse Git' respectively). They could also draw upon a backlog of impressive songs assigned to the band but at that point unrecorded or unreleased.

Even so it's hard to believe what they achieved when given free reign in the studio for the first time. What was their secret? One word - compression. It took a three-CD box to bring this point home to us. Rhino Handmade issued *The Complete Headquarters Sessions* and I snapped it up. How much of a Monkees fanatic am I? Well,

this is pretty damning evidence of some form of fixation.

The box set collects every single session recording made in the production of this LP. (True, there are several other 1960s records which one would have chosen first for such a privilege; an official box set like this for *Revolver* wouldn't go amiss, although I'm aware that's an area already bootlegged to death).

But this document reveals one of the prime secrets in the construction of a pop record. Everything starts as an instrumental. They only evolved into pop songs at the eleventh hour, when vocal tracks were added; most of the preparatory work is spent getting the musical backdrops right. Accordingly we hear several instrumental takes of the numbers; The Monkees may not have shone as particularly outstanding players, but they were determined to get it right! And not knowing any better, I reckon you'd be hard pressed to tell the musicianship on *Headquarters* apart from their earlier recordings (even if this took some heavy editing of the shakier aspects of Dolenz's drumming).

The box includes late-night recordings of Monkees fooling around (perhaps turned-on at the time), for example Dolenz delivering a spirited rendition of 'Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho'. Such a take was too far-out for release on a 1960s bubble-gum LP; in 2004, it's vital evidence of his enthusiastic performing skills. All four separate tracks for the vocal escapade 'Zilch', are presented one after the other; hear the band crack up, improvise, and make good. The Monkees discover concrete poetry.

The Monkees were not passive participants in the recording process – and reading between the lines it seems that their most important contribution may have been as arrangers. They collaborated closely with Chip Douglas and producer Douglas Hatlelid, throwing ideas around in the studio, working up songs from scratch and coming up with improved arrangements of archive material. This is where their unique collection of personalities came into play. A manufactured band they may have been but the personas we saw on TV were, as best can tell, uncontrived and shone through everywhere in the TV show and on record. They had energy, imagination and ideas (more of these than many 'real' bands have today) and found a way to feed these into the music. They were canny enough not to depart entirely from the formula that had made their earlier records so successful: a modern sound (jangly guitar, bubblegum tunes) tinged with a quaint olde world feel (quotes from vaudeville and use of 'archaic' instruments such as the harpsichord and tack piano). Yet they also shared the optimism and adventurousness of the times - carrying off relatively avant-garde moves such as the aforementioned 'Zilch' without embarrassment, making them fun, charming and of a piece with the rest of their work. They furthermore had some very strong competition to live up to, and were in a good position to learn (by osmosis if nothing else) from the heavyweight songwriting and production talent they were in contact with.

The pay-off comes on disc three of the boxed set: the entire LP in order, in original punchier mono mix, with vocals added - as if by magic. Perhaps singing the songs was the easiest part for them; no out-takes for that part of the record.

To play the three CDs of these sessions works magic; hear two discs worth of sprawling, to be followed by a single disc of economy and, as I said, compression. Perfect statements in less than three minutes. These songs get right to the point. They start immediately (not after 15 minutes of 'jamming'); they have a definite discernible shape; and they have endings. They delight the heart, mind and ears of the listener, and they do it in a tiny space of time. That, my friends, is the essence of pure pop.

Headquarters was the only record they would make entirely on their own, but a mix of self-penned numbers and bought in songs would provide at least two further classic LPs in *Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn and Jones Ltd.* and the *Head* soundtrack. Even their later records, made after the TV show had been cancelled and with a reduced number of Monkees taking part, contain a larger share of goodies than you'll find on any LP by one of Pete Waterman's acts.

◆How does a porpoise sing?

Headquarters is just one remarkable achievement amongst many in their career. And the Monkees phenomenon probably couldn't be contrived again. Don Kirshner tried, with a cartoon group: he famously described the Archies as 'the band that wouldn't talk back' - but whilst they made plenty of fine songs, 'Sugar Sugar' would be their only hit to enjoy anything like the enduring mass appeal of the Monkees' enormous back catalogue. And for a more recent attempt to do something in the same vein, contrast the broad and evergreen popularity of the Monkees TV show with the limited appeal of the drab S Club Seven TV series.

Most attempts to explain the Monkees' success make sense only on a superficial level. For instance, the Monkees may have had the 'best songwriters of their time' working for them, but this doesn't explain why the songs they wrote were in most cases also the best songs of their careers. (Who cares about anything else that Neil Diamond penned, for instance?) Nor is it easy to account for the likes of 'The Porpoise Song' (from the *Head* soundtrack), one of the most beautiful psychedelic tunes ever recorded – not only performed by a manufactured band but written by a decidedly un-psychedelic professional writer-for-hire (Carole King).

We're not trying to imply that the Monkees' career is some kind of musical miracle – just that there's more to this story than the known history of the band can currently explain. But one thing we are sure of is this - The Monkees were not just a manufactured boy band, not even just the *first* manufactured boy band, they are the *King* of the Boy Bands.

ROBERT DOBALINA

◆The Monkees, *Headquarters* (reissue) USA RHINO 4509-97662-2 CD (1995)
◆The Monkees, *Headquarters Sessions* USA RHINO HANDMADE RHM7715 3 x CD (2000)
◆Sources: *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth*, ed Kim Cooper and David Smay. USA FERAL HOUSE 2001, ISBN 0-922915-69-5.

The Song is Love

Brian Wilson
Brian Wilson presents Smile
USA NONESUCH 79846-2 CD (2004)

Brian Wilson's 'teenage symphony to God' finally gets released, almost 40 years late. A musical and lyrical 'journey across America', travelling in space from Plymouth Rock to Hawaii, and in time from the 1960s back to the founding fathers. Abandoned in 1966 following a chronic loss of confidence by Wilson, exacerbated by psychological problems, drug abuse, and the resistance of The Beach Boys. For years Wilson resisted any notion of completing it, not wanting to reawaken the personal demons associated with the experience. But the success of the *Pet Sounds* tour and the support and encouragement of the friends and musicians around him changed his mind.

THE KEY

The problems preventing the completion of *Smile* turned out to be more psychological than practical - once Wilson had made his mind up to do it, a small push was all that was needed to get it finished. Old friend Van Dyke Parks came back on board to complete the lyrics. The master tapes had long been assumed to be lost or in the clutches of some unhelpful corporate type / band member, yet when the moment for action came they appeared out of nowhere. Wilson's musical collaborator Darian Sahanaja (of The Wondermints) loaded them onto his laptop, which allowed him and Wilson to rearrange the order of the tracks at will and determine the best sequence for the album.

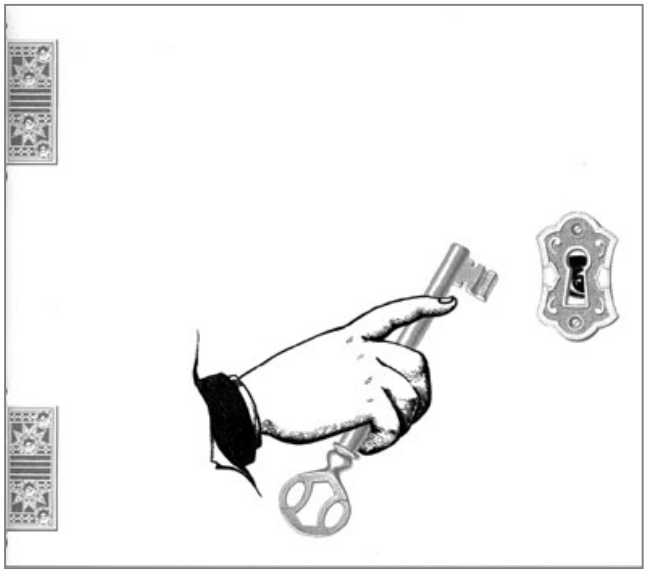
This rearrangement brought together the infamous 'Elements' and 'Heroes and Villains' suites. The CD format also allowed the creation of a new, third suite (the 'Child') out of the leftovers, a piece that would have fit awkwardly on the two sides of a vinyl LP. The sequencing of the finished *Smile* is just perfect: everything flows naturally and logically from one section to another, with the most dramatic leaps in key and mood bridged by lovely new orchestrations which rework themes from the record. The presentation of the *Smile* material, in an elaborately structured yet coherent sequence that gives it all added resonance: it is *this* which music fans had been missing for so long. That key to the puzzle is what has ultimately been supplied by this release; and it has required minimal effort from Brian Wilson, to whom it was 'obvious' all along. But it wasn't obvious to us! (To acknowledge our dilemma, the image of a hand clutching a key adorns the front cover of the CD booklet).

GOD BLESS AMERICA

Preoccupied (as ever) with the fabric of America, its history, its hidden meanings, Van Dyke Parks supplied layered lyrics for *Smile*, filled with punning and twisting, concealing as much as they reveal. Faced with a tricky, ambiguous portrait of America like 'Cabinessence', Wilson refitted a single song to fashion three smaller songs, contained within the larger whole like Russian dolls. This is but one example of a perfect synthesis of music and lyric, exemplifying the compression of this grand work. Wilson's vision may have been simplistic and childlike, but he was also ambitious, forward-looking and optimistic. He also knew that he needed collaborators to flesh out his ideas and give them more weight. In turn he acted as a sounding board, giving shape and direction to their work. The finished *Smile* may not be 100% successful on this count – but Van Dyke Parks would go on to hone and improve the ideas developed with Wilson, and take them into a new direction with his own 1967 masterpiece, *Song Cycle*.

As befits a 'teenage symphony to God', Brian Wilson also sought a spiritual dimension to the work. He wound up with a vaguely Buddhist motto ('the smile you send…') to steer him, decided to begin each recording session with a loving prayer to God, opened the record with a wordless prayer (significant in that it IS wordless), and originally closed it with the valedictory, near-apocalyptic statement of death that is 'Surf's Up'. Along the way, the more conventionally religious Parks supplies clues – for example, raising questions about the morality of the treatment of ethnic minorities in American history, the wonder of a childlike vision (a little child shall lead them), and even (in 'Wonderful') offering a celebration of conventional married family life, and an exhortation to obey the commandment 'Honour Thy Father and Mother'. 99% of conventional rock and roll and pop tunes promote the joys of extra-marital sex. None of that for Parks, who sees married life as a journey of fulfilment where 'farther down the path is a mystery'. 'Wonderful' must be unique in this regard.

That said, some of the sentiments in *Smile* are rather cloying and hard to stomach – in particular the heavy-handed romanticisation of children and Native Americans. But that's not all there is to the lyrics in *Smile*. Look behind the more obvious statements and you'll find a breathtaking array



of fleeting yet arresting images and ideas, not to mention plenty of warm, hokey humour.

CHARLES IVES CRAZINESS

Listening to the bootleg tapes of *Smile* required some patience and commitment, as they forced us to work our way through, say, several arrangements of the 'Heroes and Villains' theme; on the surface, not exactly thrill-a-minute listening but still providing a fascinating insight into Wilson's thought processes, and a promise of what *Smile* was to be – or could have been. By contrast, the 2004 *Smile* successfully selects the choice cuts, and distils them into a coherent whole. Yet if I have a criticism it's that it is *too* compressed. For much of the record the band almost seem to be racing through the arrangements as fast as possible in order to stick to the original vinyl LP length, with the manic intensity of someone compressing a Shakespeare play into ten minutes. Take the 'crow flies uncover the cornfield' section at the end of 'Cabinessence', for example: each layer of the track is allowed to appear for one single bar to make its point, before another element is introduced. This is simply one of the most beautiful moments of music ever heard, yet it's over in a flash.

Wilson's ideas for *Smile* were simply too ambitious to fit into a single LP. If the creators had taken advantage of the CD format and let the material expand and breathe a little more, maybe over a 3 CD box set, it might feel less constricted. On the other hand this compression does contribute to what Marc Baines has described as the 'Charles Ives craziness' of the record. Despite the sun-drenched, welcoming and optimistic nature of much of the music, the overall effect is totally bewildering, keeping us on our tippy toes for 40 minutes with one sudden and unexpected change of direction after another, never settling into a comfortable pattern. Like many Ives compositions, *Smile* is an efficient compositional model for conveying maximal information in a minimal space.

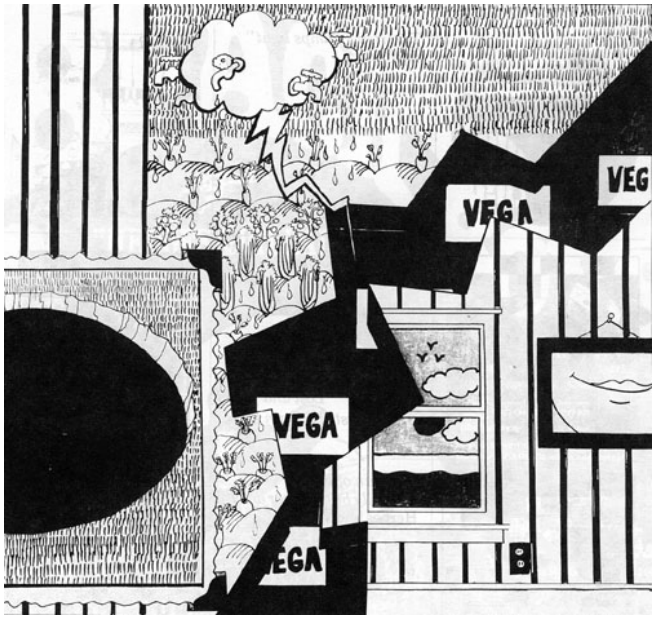
The roots of this mosaic approach for Wilson were in 'Good Vibrations' (the first part of *Smile* to be recorded), which completely threw out traditional pop composition and recording techniques. The song was pieced together from multiple fragments, a process which created a radically different structure from the usual verse-chorus-middle 8 rotation that listeners were familiar with. Even if the final song was tempered with pop lyrics by Mike Love to fully work, it proved that avant-garde compositional techniques need not alienate a mass audience.

The other completed 'songs' that escaped from the original *Smile* sessions ('Heroes and Villains', 'Cabinessence', 'Wonderful', 'Vegetables') followed this approach to a greater or lesser degree. The remaining parts of *Smile* were not recognisable as 'normal' pop songs; rather, they were complex progressions in miniature, building on simple repetitive structures, more akin to Moondog's round compositions than pop songs. Fragments of music combine to make songs, songs combine to form suites, suites combine to make the album as a whole. The entire structure of *Smile* is like a fractal drawing – no matter what magnification lens you view it through, the underlying form is identical.

A KITSCH CLASSIC

There's been a minor backlash of sorts against *Smile*; hardly surprising considering the absurdly high expectations that it has attracted over the years (for which many of us are guilty of encouraging). These views were most coherently articulated by Paul Morley, writing in *The Observer* (19th September 2004), who described it as a 'kitsch classic' and 'musically sophisticated, aesthetically conservative' (in contrast to the likes of Hendrix, the Ramones and Dr Dre). He's taking a pop at Wilson for not following the obvious (and more hip and sexy) trends of the times (ie loud guitars / psychedelic effects etc). But Wilson didn't need to follow fads or use modern technology to write great music; and unlike many of his peers he could see the unexplored potential in 'uncool' and supposedly dead forms of music. He also knew that the use of non-rock instruments (tubas, xylophones and swanny whistles) and reworkings of folks musics would make the perfect musical setting for Van Dyke Parks' lyrical travelogue.

There is some truth in Morley's assertion that *Smile* is 'pure artificial Hollywood in the way it patches together the inauthentic, the whitewashed, the brazenly commercial, the sentimental, the censored. It feels like drowning in the Pacific and having a



sweetened history of mid-20th-century American life flash before your eyes.' Yet is this a bad thing? For me, the historical veracity or otherwise of *Smile* is irrelevant. *Smile* is like a Spaghetti Western film by Sergio Leone, which is to say a personal, tangential and skewed view of the world and history which entertains and stimulates the imagination more than it accurately reflects real life. And the same goes for the most part of The Beach Boys' oeuvre (and arguably most pop music) – we all know that Wilson didn't surf, yet this didn't stop him *imagining* the glory of it. His songs about surfing have touched millions of people in a way that Morley must find hard to understand. And if Morley wants an objective view of America, The Beach Boys are the wrong place to look – he should try a history book.

THE GREATEST LP NEVER MADE?

Is *Smile* the greatest LP ever made? David Thomas of Pere Ubu had something to say on the subject. Talking in the days before a release for *Smile* seemed likely, he claimed that it was 'the greatest LP never made' precisely *because* it had never been finished – enough inspiring snatches of great music had become public to suggest what it could have been, and listeners could use this raw material to imagine their own perfect LP. The final version could only be disappointing in comparison with the version inside our heads. True, the ideas in *Smile* are open-ended enough to suggest lots of other ways the music could be arranged, organised and performed. 'Mrs O'Leary's Cow' (aka 'Fire') sounds as fierce and powerful as a track by Otomo Yoshihide's japnoise group Ground-Zero, and right now I'd like to hear what the irreverent yet respectful Otomo would make of *Smile*.

And yet *Smile* has achieved its position in people's hearts, because it represents for modern minds the ultimate meeting of pop music and art; of vision, talent and skill; an achievement which seems a miracle in today's steadfastly cynical world. But at the same time this says something about the contemporary mindset. The record has emphatically *not* been part of the common cultural landscape of pop music, in the way that *Sgt Pepper* has. The Beatles record is, for better or worse, something that millions of people have grown up with since 1967; it's become a reference point, ingrained in the consciousness, a cliché. This has allowed a generation of people to reinvestigate the arrangement, content and meaning of each song (often to the point of over-analysis). This has been one of the gaps with *Smile*. We now have years available to us, to 'decode' it. Whilst we're obsessed with the greatness of a 40-year-old piece of music, we struggle to conceive how to build on what it achieved. Well, a statement has finally been made and may we be thankful for that. *Smile* exists, whether it's in your head or on record. Now let's better it.

ROBERT DOBALINA (with thanks to Steve Bynghall)

Ron 'Pate and His Debonairs featuring Fred Lane

Raudelunas
'Pataphysical Revue
UNITED KINGDOM
ALCOHOL RECORDS
ALRP1CD CD (2003)

Revd Fred Lane somehow managed to issue two LPs under his name on Mark Kramer's Shimmy-Disc label. These records, *From The One the Cut You* and *Car Radio Jerome* are two of my favourite LPs, matchless statements of absurdity and fleeting madness somehow nailed down into musical form. I suppose the second one is more 'accessible', with more obvious reference points for its trenchant musical satire (big band jazz, rockabilly, lounge music etc), but the first one continues to baffle and haunt me yet. Although it's filled with zany humour, there's an undercurrent of menace to the lyrics and performance which verges on the psychotic. Everything about it has always intrigued me, down to the little spoof LP covers plastered all over the cover. The references to the band Ron 'Pate's Debonairs, and the obvious aliases for the band members – Abdul Ben Camel,. Cyd Cherise, Dick Foote et al - also hinted at possibilities that made the mind reel. Clearly, these guys hadn't come out of nowhere. One of the tracks, which featured a bizarre recit from Lane about sailing the China seas in his pyjamas for a raft, had faint traces of bemused audience reaction captured on the tape. Could they have done this live someplace?

When word reached me (in 2001) that Ed Baxter had this release planned on his Alcohol label, I was waiting for years with bated breath. He hinted at an insane live show, performed in secret in a Southern state, and a rare private press LP. Perhaps some answers would be forthcoming, if I could only access these pre-Shimmy Disc documents. Needless to say, I'm left even more confused by the document I finally hold in my hands. Also initially slightly disappointed that it isn't more substantial, better recorded, or somehow more far-out. But it is growing on me with every play, and the true significance of it all starts to leak out…

The 'Pataphysical Revue in fact slightly predates the appearance of Revd Fred Lane on this earth. In the early to mid 1970s, there was a local art scene in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, apparently devoted to the cultivation of extremely marginal materials – paintings, drawings, sculptures, objects, performance, music…encouraging trained and untrained geniuses alike, and generating a lively and healthy weirdness. They called themselves Raudelunas. Those involved were heavily influenced by Dada and Surrealism, but also by a forerunner of both – the pseudo-science of Pataphysics, devised by Alfred Jarry, the creator of *Ubu Roi*. The arty young madmen who eventually formed Ron 'Pate's Debonairs had been playing free improvised music for about five years; then, the Second Raudelunas Exposition was planned as a big event, and they wanted to do a variety show – or at least, their idea of a variety show. To realise their warped vision, they decided they needed a lead singer and comedian. Amazingly, Revd Fred Lane appeared, as if by magic.

At this point you could spin the first track and start looking, with a mixture of horror and delight, at the astonishing photographs of this event which took place in 1975 at the University of Alabama. At first, it looks like a student rag week going horribly wrong, or outtakes from a lost Monty Python / Vic Reeves sketch. The young men are dressed in women's clothes, some have weird masks, comedy glasses, fright wigs. Insane-looking abstract paintings cover the walls. Lane himself has no trousers, but is wearing the archetypal compere's frilly shirt and jacket with tails, and a trilby hat. He has Robert-Crumb styled glasses and sticking plasters on both cheeks, a detail which translated onto the first Shimmy Disc LP cover. The opener song is 'Chicago (My Kinda Town)', a spoof of corny cabaret Las Vegas-styled big band material, over which Lane croons in suitably sarcastic fashion. They close the set with a similar Rat Pack number, 'Volare', which means that by close of the LP they have done an effective demolition job on 'Mom and Dad' music of the 1950s, that ranks alongside the first Residents LP. In between songs, Lane shifts into a manic, spot-on impersonation of a smarmy nightclub comedian and turns in a couple of pointless monologues packed with nonsense and anti-jokes; and hosts door prize events in which he manages free-wheeling blatant insults at the expense of the audience. Surreal, zany and slightly nasty…naturally, all of this is completely misleading as to what the rest of the set will be. Maximum confusion seems to be the intended aim.

Early on comes the 'Concerto For Active Frogs', turning out to be a serious piece of modern electro-acoustic composition. A centrepiece work, and one of the reasons they wanted to do the show in the first place; it features pre-recorded tapes by Anne Le

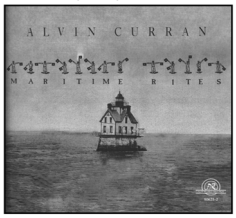
Baron, a convincing live performance of acoustical groaning noises, and a vocal chorus of croaking from the musicians. (This one even gets restored to its full length on the CD – four minutes were cut for the LP release!) Equally strong is 'The Lonely Astronauts', a splendid free-form big-band improvised piece (and not far from the early work of The Black Crack Revue). Like all enthusiasts, the Debonairs performed different musical styles, under different names; 'The Lonely Astronauts' is credited to The Blue Denim Deals Without The Arms. As The Captains of Industry, they performed live sound-art events using nothing but electrical consumer goods. An example of that is included here, with the whirring of little motors, vacuum cleaners, blenders, TV sets and radios all chattering in synch. As The Nubis Oxis Quarum, they did something else again – playing acoustic instruments again, but including archaic ones like a harp, a musette and a cymbalom, and propelling their long continuous semi-structured piece with chanted Latin read from the works of Caesar. In this incarnation, they knock current 'underground' combos like No-Neck Blues Band and Sunburned Hand of the Man into a cocked hat.

The taped performance was made into a private press limited edition LP, issued on the Say Day Bew records label (another detail which carried forward into the Shimmy Disc release). If you were lucky enough to stumble across an edition of this original record at the time (fewer than 1000 copies were ever made), you'd have been delighted. Which might be why I feel this slight disappointment with this Alcohol Records version, which somehow dilutes the original madness; everything is explained, discovered, and packaged. The layout of the sleeve is one problem; it seems to turn the Revue into a museum piece, with its rather flat, face-value re-presentation of the materials. But you can't have your cake and eat it; Alcohol Records deserve some kind of a medal for bringing this enlightened music to the ears of a wider audience. Besides, all of ones qualms melt away when you hear 'The Shemp Howard Monologue', an inspired Fred Lane fantasy episode like Viv Stanshall and W S Burroughs rolled into one, with a collage of jazz and audience applause mixed in; it's a fragment of thoroughly confusing genius compressed into less than two minutes.

The extensive sleeve notes will also reward and entertain you, although they don't mention anything at all about what came afterwards, so I'm still completely in the dark as to how we got from here to the *From the One that Cut You* LP. No matter. In all, this is a release which fits nicely with Ed Baxter's agenda for the encouragement of marginal artists - eg L Voag, Orchestre Murphy, Atom of Doubt, and to a certain extent Faust, who he continued to support even when they weren't so marginal. If there's a lesson to be learned, it's that the best weirdoes don't try and make a career out of it; we are indeed fortunate when their moments of glorious insanity are documented for a single fleeting hour. As is the case here.

ED PINSENT 20/11/2004
PO Box 556, London SE5 0RL, UK

80625-2 (2CDs)



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NEW WORLD RECORDS

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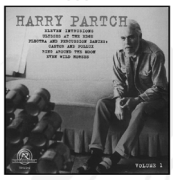
80621-2



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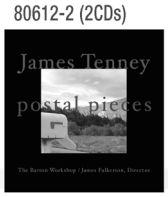

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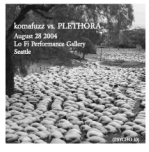

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1926 W. Casino Rd. #H207 Everett Wa 98204 USA

FIELD RECORDINGS+

murmer
They were dreaming they were stones
USA GROUND FAULT RECORDINGS GF030 CD (2003)

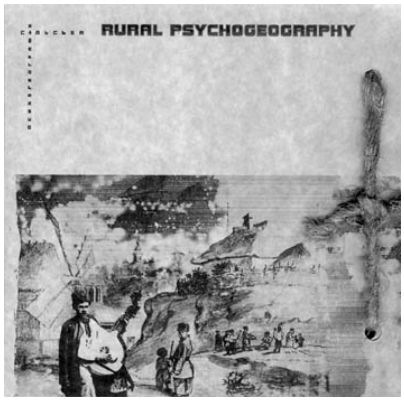
This is an absolutely first-class set of electro-acoustic works derived from field recordings. London-based American Patrick McGinley has 'arrived' with this masterful statement; in terms of purposeful, intensive reworking of original source materials, he has attained a high plateau of achievement. There are currently many dilettantes in the area of field recording who think it's sufficient to buy an expensive microphone and mini-disc recorder and wander outside in the park for 3 hours, but murmer succeeds where hundreds fail: he genuinely makes you hear the world anew. And it's not all extended processing, either; the original sound sources remain recognisable, yet he also creates compelling, urgent and exciting new sounds out of them. It's as though he went right back to the roots of this kind of music; Pierre Schaeffer has been his spiritual mentor, and he lives by the philosophies of the Groupe de Recherches de Musique Concrète. (NB no he doesn't - see interveiw thi issue).

The sources are listed – not in scrupulous Chris Watson detail, but you can't have everything – and include all manner of unlikely entities. Car seat massager, the Brooklyn bridge, a gas meter, elevator shaft, airplane cabin, football crowds, and a watertank are all included, plus obscure references to places, people and things that mean something only to him. Near the end of the CD, we hear strange celestial voices which I assume must be the football crowds, layered over a powerful jet-engine motor; quite an amazing transcendent sound results. Might be worth comparing this to Jason Kahn's use of the same sound on his *Songs For Nicholas Ross* CD. Even when he's droning away on auto-pilot, murmer is good.

A 'mystical' title perhaps, but hinting at something about the fantasy life of inanimate objects; if McGinley is a secret alchemist, perhaps he can perceive something of the inner soul of the materials and objects that he records, and strains to lay bare their psychic templates, their core meanings, with his work. That metaphysical hogwash all comes from me, by the way, not murmer - who is a level-headed chap and refuses to cloak his art in mystery. This release is part of the Californian Ground Fault Series I sequence, devoted to Quiet music; it's a very enjoyable and high-quality work by a gifted creator.

ED PINSENT 04/11/2004
www.groundfault.net

murmer is interviewed this issue.



Various Artists
Rural Psychogeography
UKRAINE NEXSOUND NS20 CD [2004]

Strictly, this isn't all field recordings by any means, but the theme alone qualifies it for admission to this section. It's an extremely interesting and excellent compilation from the Ukraine, by the same label who brought us The Moglass CD last year, the one all about the telegraph poles. The front cover of that one, at least, included an affecting image of a lonely and cold Eastern European landscape receding into the distance. Here's something along vaguely similar lines, where all the cuts are themed around the psychogeography of certain places and sites – mostly in the countryside, hence the title. Geoff Dugan, who opens the comp, released two superb CDs dedicated to psychogeography of urban locations on his own GD Stereo label around the late 1990s. Psychogeography is a fascinating area of study, dating back to the 1950s and the ideas of Situationist philosopher Guy Debord; it's not a thing I fully understand or have experienced myself. I've never practised making a 'derive' in London. I'd probably be good at the day-dreaming and time-wasting side of it though. What appeals is the idea that it's possible to reveal the true nature of a place, its inner psyche or soul it you will, simply by wandering around, and keeping your eyes and ears open.

Debord had the intention that psychogeography should be a criticism of modern life, specifically the confines of modern urban planning, which crushes the soul. It's interesting to see this 'rural' update on the idea. 16 sound artists here contribute vivid field recordings captured from named sites, or musical / sonic portraits of such places. The contributors include Francisco López, Anla Courtis, Jason Kahn, Tomas Korber, The Moglass, Martin Tétreault, Rosy Parlane, Kim Cascone, Kotra, and others. Clearly a pool of talent drawn from the worlds of minimal electronica, electro-acoustic sound art and improvisation. Some tracks are untreated environmental documents; others deploy extensive treatments of same; some are overlays of electronic pieces with documentary tapes, some simply musical tunes dedicated to a favourite spot.

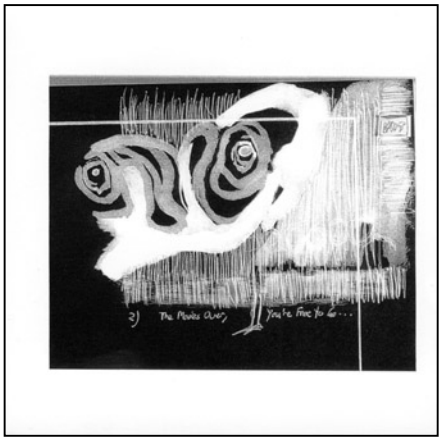
Rural Psychogeography is a very well sequenced record – that might be its main strength. We have index points, but there are no gaps between the tracks; this creates a seamless flow to the music, and if you take it in one sitting you will float across the globe while seated in your armchair. Although comprising 16 different locations (real or imaginary), it's more like an extended walk though and across a single, ever-changing environment. The listener makes vast

impossible strides through time and space, experiencing changing weather conditions. The unities of the globe are discernible, and the hidden mysteries become a little clearer. I say this even if the comp may contain a few false notes; there are a few excessively digital works which seem to go against the vaguely 'organic' vibe; and it sags somewhat in the middle, where we enter quite creaky and boring ultra-droney zones. But the overall effect is pleasing, a endearing thoughtful and effective set. The cover montage is pretty hopeless, but the package is saved by the piece of string which holds it together. How rustic can you get? I wonder who actually compiled this one…

ED PINSENT 06/11/2004
http://nexsound.org

Robert Millis
Leaf Music Drunks Distant Drums: Recordings from Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar
USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM26 CD (2004)

An intriguing and entertaining collection of documentary and field recordings – or should that be street recordings – gathered from Asian lands by this Climax Golden Twin on his many travels through the Eastern hemisphere. Mostly, Robert thought fit to turn on his tape recorder whenever he heard live music being played, and captured great documents of ceremonial or spontaneous music in this way; but then, he also went into record mode to capture anything that appeared sonically interesting to him at the time – from insects chattering in the forest, to drunks roaring in the streets. The music then is very exciting, but so are the recordings of forests, insects, frogs and general evening ambience. The insects in particular create a noise far wilder than any shrill digital electronica artist could muster. So wide a net does his tape recorder cast that we also hear traffic, taxi rides, temple orchestras, street songs, sermons, samples from the radio, and so forth. What's particularly notable is when the ambient traffic sounds blend with the singing and the music, such as happens here on track 9 to pleasing effect.



In theme and content, this collection is not that far apart from the Alan Bishop collections represented in the Sublime Frequencies collections this ish, but Robert's approach is much less 'far out' than that of Bishop. Millis is, I suggest, more attuned to finding out local knowledge regarding spirits and saints, celebrations and festivals, and will pass the time of day with elephant riders or try and find out the significance of circles of tuned drums. Let Millis be your guide on this mini-odyssey through strange lands; great to listen to and also useful as an insight as to the one of many 'bedrock' influences on the work of this very singular band.

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004
PO Box 22195, Seattle, WA 98122-0195, USA
www.anomalousrecords.com
www.climaxgoldentwins.com

A.M.
Strata
NORWAY HUMBUG 029 CDR (ND)

A.M. is Anthony Milton. He made this record in his home of Wellington, New Zealand. His main tool in creating sonic statements is his 'ancient and oft-repaired tape recorder', whose cracked-everyday functionality brings a certain mystery and lo-fi charm to the finished product. Some of these toons came out on cassette in 2001, since rescued to CDR format. These tracks appeared at first to be mostly field recordings, along with some half-hearted musical instrument-playing audible in the far background. Or is it an improv CD, with the additional twist of being recorded in the open-air? Probably the former – the balance comes out in favour of vague whirring and echoed droney noises, with most 'musical' efforts pushed to background. In all there's nine examples of the A.M. approach to life – uncertain and indecisive seems to sum it up, and this rambling record makes an ideal soundtrack to a day where you accomplish very little. Don't send him out to mail a letter, whatever you do! Still, unlike fellow NZ player David Khan he's not out to impress us with the ponderousness of his art; rather, he's more about gently revealing whatever delights he may through sonic mystery processes and low-level intervention. Each track is illustrated by a little watercolour painting. 'Last Song of the Machine' is about the most intriguing offer; it captures, live on tape, the death of his old tape recorder (as alluded to above) and leaves behind evidence of suitably distressed surface. Quite nice.

ED PINSENT 04/10/2004
tchartan@yahoo.com
www.tibprod.com/humbug.htm

B J Nilsen / Hazard
Live at Konzerthaus, Vienna 06_12_03
UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TO:CDR5 CD (2003)

When I was in Stockholm for a few days last winter I decided to go and check out the one place I knew was involved in producing new music, Fylkingen. Located on the precipitous edge of Södermalm, it is I imagine hard enough to locate on the best of days, let alone in the near whiteout conditions that seemed to prevail when I was there. I struggled through a raging blizzard, only to find that it could only be approached by descending a treacherous slope covered in ice; every footstep courted certain death. Of course, once I had managed to drag myself to the entrance, by now chilled to the bone, I found that it was closed. There was nobody there and I was left to contemplate a return journey that may well have been this reviewer's last.

Benny J Nilsen is a native of these sometimes-icy climes, and it is obviously his familiarity with the meteorological conditions that caused him to choose the pseudonym by which he is better known: Hazard. Nilsen recently performed at the same Fylkingen (god alone knows how) with Christian Fennez and head-Toucher himself Jon Wozencroft, who was on hand to show his old home movies. All of this touchy-feelyness also led these three, along with Philip Jeck, to take part in the Generator festival held in Fennez's hometown of Vienna at the end of 2003. This CD details Nilsen's contribution to the evening's proceedings.

When one thinks of all the 'Live at…' albums produced over the years, one tends to think of impossibly grandiose, baroque statements of excess. Who doesn't recall fondly the implausible audacity of albums like *Frampton Comes Alive!* or Neil Diamond's *Hot August Night*? Can the outrageous rock and roll of Zeppelin's 1973 Madison Square Gardens performances ever be topped? You would think that Vienna's Konzerthaus would be a conducive setting for adding another great performance to the already overflowing lists of such recordings. Excess however doesn't seem to come naturally to Nilsen, well schooled as he is by the social democracy in which he lives. He instead delivers an icy-cool set, relatively free from anything approaching debauchery.

The entire album consists of the single track that constituted Nilsen's performance on this Austrian evening. He seems to have formed a close working relationship with label-mate Chris Watson, and Watson's field recordings serve as the source material for much of Nilsen's sound at the Konzerthaus, as they

have done for several of his other albums. Nilson's preferred method of working involves manipulating these recordings into an almost unrecognizable form. Here he seems to be content to let them speak for themselves on occasion; the whole piece being like a duet between the 'naturalness' of the original material, and the 'unnaturalness' of Nilsen's manipulation.

The sound of the CD is overall very Touch-like. If you are the proud owner of such an item already I'm sure you'll know what I mean. It starts out very quiet and generally stays quiet and atmospheric all the way through. I've heard that live, Nilsen is capable of delivering some real volume but that is not something that is in evidence here. There are many varieties of humming and buzzing, interspersed by the close-up sounds of the birds and the bees. It builds into some minor crescendos along the way, and generally gets louder at the end. The most interesting section comes toward the end with a drone fashioned from a church organ (itself courtesy of Nilsen's contribution to another Touch compilation). It appears as if the organist has expired on the job, his hands frozen in rigor mortis on the devil's interval.

This CDR is the fifth installment in Touch's Public Address series, which as the name implies, documents the live operations of various Touch alumni. I haven't heard the others, but I think that this is one for completists of the Nilsen sound. It's all very well and good, a pleasant enough listen, but I find it hard to be thoroughly engaged by Nilsen's cool touch. For a more interesting listen you may be better off going with one of his other themed albums, like 'Land' or 'Wind'. Nilsen's website suggests that he is not one to miss a sonic opportunity. He has a new album on the way; he is engaged in writing music for several films; and for a small fee you can download your official Nilsen ring-tone. Enough said really.

AARON ROBERTSON
info@touchmusic.org.uk
www.touchmusic.org.uk

jgrzinich
Intimations
NEW ZEALAND CMR RECORDS / MAAHELI STUDIO CMR-7 CD (2004)

First solo release by our good friend John Grzinich, the American video and sound artist whose work we've previously heard about in connection with his countrymen and colleagues mnortham, Seth Nehil and of course the minimal-electronics combo Frequency Curtain. The common 'link' (if any) between these friendly musicians is they're all steeped in the field of modernistic electro-acoustic sound and are committed to intensive ultra-processing of field recordings, so that virtually nothing is recognisable as a natural sound by the time they're through with it. Yep, old Mother Nature can't push them around, that's for sure! Jgrzinich is no exception and lives by this tough-guy code 100%; the great thing is that, despite

processes, his work is not at all synthetic-sounding. On the contrary, this release is packed with authenticity, depth and detail.

As with work of mnortham, the finished product is just the tip of an iceberg, concealing years of effort. *Intimations* is the result of about 2-3 years of working, most of the activity largely peripheral to actually making sound recordings; it's more to do with travelling, moving, observing places, and…well, thinking about everything an awful lot. You could say the same about many artists, and most art (not just music); but this fellow certainly draws our attention to this aspect of the creative process. These activities, meanderings and meditations all gradually feed into the work, layer after layer. Sorry I can't be more precise about it than that, but no more concrete information is available. Grzinich deliberately keeps himself mysterious, concealing all with an allusive mini-essay included here, that reveals little more than scraps of hints and clues. For example, 'some analogies to alchemical processes are embedded in the sounds,' he mutters, as though that told us anything.

But don't let his apparent obtuseness put you off. The CD itself is completely accessible, providing lengthy drones and unusual textures, sensations of soaring and flying across vast distances; mysterious shapes that seem to contain enormous canyons, huge clouds, skies, oceans, mountains…the titles, such as 'Fluid Itinerancy', 'Sinking Tides' and 'Sun in hand, stone in water' all hint at various watery sources. Each piece is filled with constant mutations, nothing ends the way it begins, and the shifts in time and space are

quite dramatic. This 'sonic diary of life in transit throughout Europe' will genuinely reawaken your curiosity about the movements of the geophysical globe, and do so more successfully than a travel agency advert. A highly personal and intimate portrait of an inner world, carved from the outer world's acoustical secrets.

ED PINSENT 02/10/2004
www.cmr.co.nz
mail@cmr.co.nz

Jason Kahn
Songs for Nicolas Ross
ITALY ROSSBIN RECORDS RS014 CD (2003)

I sometimes wonder if so-called 'advances in modern technology' are simply easing and increasing our capacity to be trivial and boring. A lot of the CD sleeve designs sent to *The Sound Projector* present photographic images which go out of their way to frame commonplace objects and places of utter banality. I put it down to the increased availability of digital cameras, which make it much easier for people to produce a super-abundance of boring photographs. Another anecdote I heard recently involves folk who accidentally activate their mobile phones by sitting on them, and unknowingly make 20-minute phone calls, real-time broadcasts from the restaurant or pub. Making accidental field recordings, as it were. Imagine the reaction of baffled recipient of such a call.

At a time when such banality is on the increase, Kahn sees fit to add to it with these aural snapshots of daily banality. It's a collection of field recordings which, I would guess, he's simply picked up like so much fluff in the course of his continual travels by airline. As he notches up the frequent-flyer miles, his digital device is permanently set in the 'Record' mode hoovering up such fragments as he may. This record then, over 25 tracks, presents an entire 'suite' or 'song cycle' if you will, of such fragments, recorded over three years in cities across Europe and the USA.

Besides vague crackling sounds, we also hear chuntering and chattering of populace, clearly captured from some international airport; and even the sound of him riding in the plane, with droning jet engines; latter sound appears as 'filler' between the other tracks, indicative of number of flights he's making. On this one-joke record, the payoff seems to be that he finally meets Nicolas Ross at the end; Ross might be the small child whose delighted voice we hear as they walk in the countryside together. The CD was, he reveals, intended for Nicolas's birthday... 'I thought of the pieces as short songs, either as lullabyes or just brief sonic environments for him to enter into.' In all, a personal diary-form CD of odd inconsequential moments, postcards of non-events.

ED PINSENT 10/10/2004
www.rossbin.com

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Joshua Abram
Lucky Kitchen presents Joshua Abram's After
SPAIN LUCKY KITCHEN LK 023 CD (2003)

Nothing world-shattering here, just an unfailingly 'nice' record – in fact it has so much niceness pouring off it like carbohydrates pouring off sugar-drenched donuts, that it just doesn't know when to quit. Abram puts together his inoffensive field recordings with assorted miniaturist musical compositions; the latter are realised using guitars, bells, pianos, and tinkly-type stuff, played in an extremely tasteful manner. It exhibits most of the thematic elements suggestive of pleasant voyages that are common to many Lucky Kitchen releases. Just pick out some of the positive words from the sleeve note to confirm this impression: 'summer …holiday … sundown …festivities …home …evoke …daily life…neighbourhood.' And yet, Abram claims there is a darker and more political side to his 'evoking' strategies: he wants to depict 'events in daily life and the world, impending war and protest come to mind.'

Is he kidding? With the gentle environment he depicts, war and protest aren't just a million miles away, they don't even exist to trouble the placid, fairy-tale atmosphere for one second. Lapping water, a church bell in the distance, lovely open air-feeling, gentle string plucking, a murmuring bass guitar…an organised anti-war march it ain't. The pieces were put together using ProTools. He allowed the exact duration of the original field recording to determine the length of each piece. Nice idea, but that's about as 'structured' as this guy gets; the rest of it is impressionistic, warm, fuzzy, and wishy-washy. Abram filters the joys of sunny days using the sonic raybans of computer processing.

ED PINSENT04/11/2004
www.luckykitchen.com

Justin Bennett
Noise Map
THE NETHERLANDS SPORE RECORDS SPORECD005 CD (2003)

You can take the boy out of Nuneaton…or something like that. Justin Bennett originally hails from this part of the U.K., which I have to confess to not knowing very well at all. The closest I've come to his part of town was playing once at the Warwick Arts Centre, and that was a quick dash up from London and then down again after the gig. Anyway, sometime in the late 1980s he seems to have departed the fair shores of Albion for The Netherlands, where he currently resides in Den Haag, which I know even less about. He now seems to divide his time between playing in several groups, performing solo, and doing various guest spots lecturing on sound related issues.

All in all it would be an understatement to say that the man's work was unknown to me, not that I would hold that against anybody. He seems to have an artistic bent, studying firstly a B.A. in fine art at the University of Sheffield before moving to The Netherlands to study sonology, which I can easily deduce as being the study of sound, although my Oxford makes no mention of such a vocation at all. It seems as if he took a liking to that low country so much that he thought he would stay.

What initially seemed appealing about this CD was its stated use of field recording, something I've had a soft spot for dating back to my own sound recording days in the fair land recently used as a scenic backdrop to a certain fantasy trilogy (answers on a post card). It also seemed as if it would be a nice break from the usual computer-generated tack that I normally have to wade through. So it would be fair to say that I was a little disappointed when I put this album on to hear not a lot of field recording at all, or at least what is present is not your Chris Watson-style high fidelity recording that we have all come to know and love. What you do hear is little snippets of actual field sound in between a lot of very heavily processed recording.

The CD overall has quite an electroacoustic vibe to it in fact, Bennett seeming to make much use of computer synthesis to either alter his original recordings, or as a device in its own right. Much of this sounds terribly close to white noise that is simply being modulated in some regard. So much for 'building terrifying landscapes from sheets of pure noise', as the press release rather optimistically claims. They might be pure noise but they are hardly terrifying, actually they sound just a little dull. It all gets a bit tedious to hear similar-sounding things repeated throughout the CD. A common motif seems to be to start out a track with some indistinguishable location sound before bringing the noise.

There just isn't much to separate the various tracks here. There are some short pieces that are made up solely of location recording, but the sound is indistinct and you are left asking the question, why did he bother? Perhaps if there had been some sort of information as to what exactly was being recorded and where they may have held more interest, but in the absence of anything like this they fail to hold your attention. The tracks that are on balance mostly noise are likewise uneventful: high frequencies get louder and then softer; drones rise and fall. One of the few exceptions to the rule is the second track, 'Swarm', which at least can claim to do something like what it says on the packet as it hums along, flitting from one sound source to the next.

I could be far off, but it looks as if the Spore label is run by Bennett to release the recordings produced by the various endeavours he is involved with. As well as producing solo work like this CD he also is part of an improv trio called Grand Mal, and a performance art group that goes by the name of BMB con. His own website contains a very detailed C.V., and an index of publications on sound theory. Bennett has obviously studied the complexities that make up what we know as sound, but this only makes it all the more surprising that this album should be so outwardly unrewarding.

AARON ROBERTSON
justin@this.is
spore.sounscaper.com
www.bmbcon.demon.nl/spore

Pawel Grabowski
Glitch Letters
IRELAND SINE 002 3" CD (2004)

Polish electro-acoustic guy with his aural snapshots of Dublin; recordings were subsequently treated digitally. A fair amount aimless clunking around in uninteresting places is what you will hear, with a fizzy laptop 'hiss' holding it all together. Why didn't he go into a lively pub for a Guinness and a chat? He'd have got something far more worthwhile. This is as ordinary as dishwater.

ED PINSENT 12/10/2004
www.sine.prv.pl
www.pawelgrabowski.prv.pl

Tarab
Surfacedrift
AUSTRALIA NATURESTRIP NS3001 CD (2003)

Australia: the big country down-under. A land of wide-open spaces, sight of much recent

confrontation between Man and the forces of nature; where the searing, summer sun will give you skin cancer quicker than you can say Fosters lager; where if you're not careful, a dingo just might steal your baby. Such are the surroundings in which Melbourne based Eamon Sprod chooses to work. Ceaselessly trailing his microphones behind him, hoping to find the very essence of the geography of this great southern continent, a land that narrowly avoided being 'discovered' by the Spanish (en-route to the Philippines) and that was known as 'New Holland' for many years by the Dutch, who were the first Europeans to set foot there.

'Surface'. A primordial scraping suggests the Dreamtime. Cicadas make their summery appearance early, before being followed by the songs of many birds. The sound of water, a babbling brook perhaps, makes itself heard. These sounds build in turn before a thunderous rumbling and high frequency hissing obliterate everything. All that remains after this sonic onslaught is a small fire crackling away, slowly digesting dry twigs and leaves. The tranquillity doesn't last long before being consumed by a volcanic eruption. A gale whips up, causing iron and wood to strain against one another in the face of the wind.

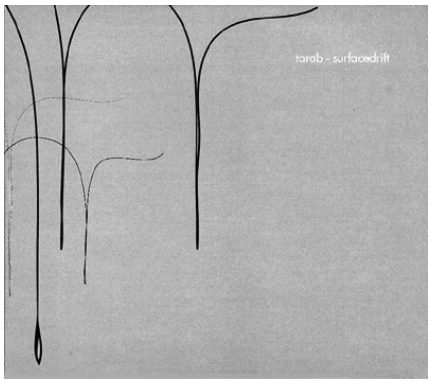
'Iron'. We pick up seemingly where we left off. Rain is slowly falling on the ubiquitous corrugated iron roofing that is a signature of Britain's former southern hemisphere colonies. Activity of sorts is taking place in the distance. The rain gets heavier, torrential even, before easing off again. Noises of construction appear: iron scraping slowly against iron; heavy objects being dragged along the ground. Everything threatens to become a Futurist symphony of manufacturing, but it is the rain that we are left with when the sounds of activity end, and when the rain itself finally ceases we are left alone under the night sky with a field of gently chirping crickets.

'Leaf'. The wind is blowing across a barren landscape, a forgotten plastic supermarket bag fluttering bravely in the stiff breeze. The wind dies away and some muddy, brown mid frequencies bath everything in their dirty waves. Radio static begins; distant voices herald some hope of contact. All the while the refugee from Woolworths continues its plaintive song. The primordial scraping returns before metamorphosing into a metallic sawing: the sound of one piece of metal slowly sliding up against another. Are those demonic voices in the background, subliminal messages about the state of our environment? Or are they just ghosts in the machine?

'Bottle'. An empty specimen is being kicked around the floor of a deserted factory. Is that Victoria Bitter or Castlemaine? The bottle is roughly handled with a metallic object. Underneath is the close-up sound of something being played with inside another bottle. Or is it the same bottle? Is this some wino's ode to the misbegotten life he leads? Is he pleading with the bottle to give up just one more drink? As he blows over the bottle's mouth, his Helmhotzian song is transformed into the sound of the sea gently lapping on a stony shore, frothing over rocks. What sea is this that laps so fast? It goes on as the sea always has, and will continue to do so long after we are gone.

This epic journey of aural geography is the first release by the Naturestrip label, which looks to position itself in the area of interplay between field recording and improvisation, mostly with found objects. There are some obvious points of reference on this album: to Chris Watson, to Señor López. And yet it has something that remains all its own: it is wedded to the landscape from whence the sounds where drawn. Not such a bad thing at all in these global days in which we live. Maybe next time they will learn not to drown their releases in such a sticky plethora of adjectives and be content to let these subtle voices speak for themselves.

AARON ROBERTSON
P.O. Box 5027, Middle Park, Victoria 3206, Australia
info@naturestrip.com
www.naturestrip.com



toshiya tsunoda
scenery of decalcomania
AUSTRALIA NATURESTRIP NS3003
CD (2004)

Seven new works from this Japanese composer who specialises in creating works out of recordings of wind, air and water – in particular when they react with plastic pipes. He's happiest when he can submerge a length of plastic pipe off the jetty down by the waterfront and stick a microphone inside it; or arrange for additional lengths of plastic pipe to be installed in a field in the countryside, allowing him to perceive the rush of wind whistling past. These are, undeniably, quite beautiful recordings, and the circumstances of their creation are scrupulously documented. His method is contrived, sure, but only slightly; he's not intervening in the landscape in an obtrusive or damaging way at all, just enough to reveal the normally invisible or inaudible elements.

That said I don't find he's advanced much, in method nor in music, since his last set *Pieces of Air* on the Lucky Kitchen label (which I raved about at the time). The experiments this time around involve set-ups with glass bottles, metal plates, and cylinders, all in the name of measuring imperceptible events which cause vibrations in space. You have to admit he knows precisely what he is doing; he regards all his experiments with the same clinical outlook. The sound of the boat on 'Ferry Passing', for example, is a potentially very touching Di Chirico-styled statement about the nostalgia of travel, but all he's interested is the phase change and the doppler effect. Very clinical. These are incredibly 'clean' and uncluttered recordings, made by an intelligent and focused man. I only wish they were a bit more engaging.

ED PINSENT 04/11/2004
PO Box 5027, Middle Park, Victoria 3206, Australia
info@naturestrip.com
www.naturestrip.com

Toshiya Tsunoda, Joel Stern, Tarab, Lawrence English
Overland
AUSTRALIA NATURESTRIP NS3002
CD (2004)

This is a set of contributions from four young experimenters in respective areas, each man supplying a single track apiece. It's roughly half field-recordings, and half quiet improvisation, and some of the work may meet in the middle someplace. It's all terribly nice, almost aggressively so; if the four of them were a band, then we'd all be force-fed bowls of muesli under their 'it's good for you' regime…Toshiya Tsunoda (see above) has at least two solo CDs available now, and has been noted with his Lucky Kitchen release last ish…his offering is a great field recording from one summer evening in Yokosuka City, Japan. Standing in 'reclaimed land', an unpromising site in which to discover much in the way of beauty, Tsunoda beats all the odds and does precisely that. Car engines and crickets vie for turf in this no-man's land. Joel Stern, as is customary, plays instruments that aren't actually instruments. Soda water and glass bottles, among other unlikely items, were selected to make sounds. With his deft use of tiny contact mics and electronic processing, he transforms them – often in real time – intro 'instant' electro-acoustic music. Tarab (see above again) is someone I know not; his 'Of Hollow Traces' appears to be a construct arranged out of other improvisations. It's a completely tedious, flat, pool of murmuring dribble. He thinks he's Francisco López; he is not. Lawrence English happened to be in Tokyo in June and New York in July during 2003. While there, he plucked field recordings from the air and later used them to evoke his 'Summer Crush'. Ah, the affairs of the heart. In terms of its editing and treatment, this one's about the most 'eventful' of the four, although its narrative thread tends to elude me.

ED PINSENT 14/10/2004
PO Box 5027, Middle Park, Victoria 3206, Australia
info@naturestrip.com
www.naturestrip.com

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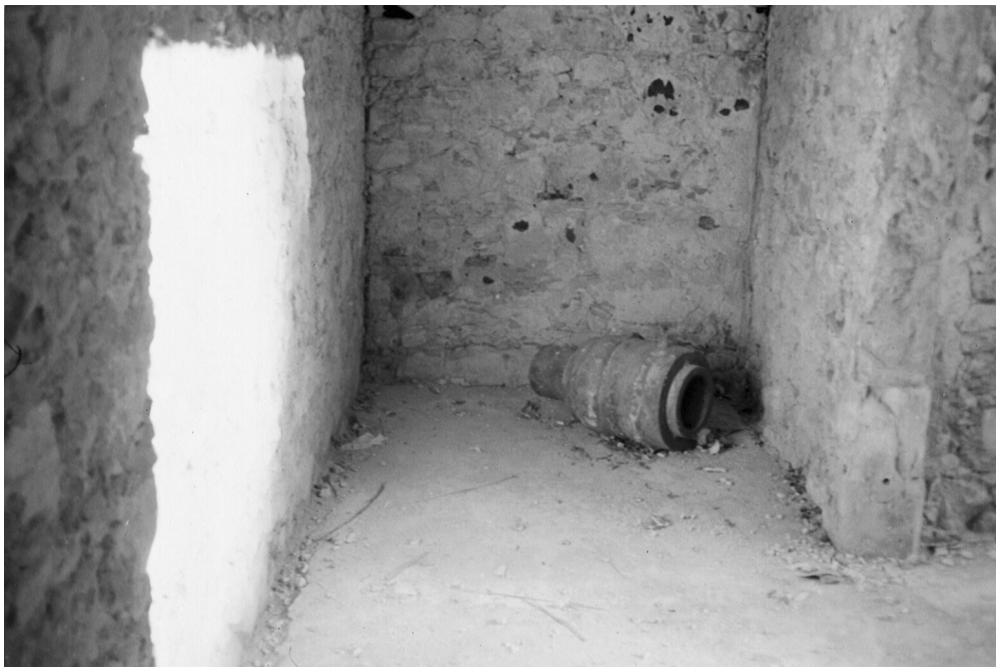
murmer



Date: 28 November 2004
Location: Cafe Nero, Kingsway, London
EP = Ed Pinsent, PM = Patrick McGinley (ie murmer)

EP When did you start getting into the electro-acoustic field?

PM When I was in my mid-teens, I started listening to industrial music and things like that, and I think that took me through to always looking for music that was one step less musical in its construction.

EP When you say Industrial, can you name some names?

PM At the time, the big commercial industrial acts. Skinny Puppy and Ministry I was listening to, and those led me to Einstürzende Neubaten. You know, getting a little bit further away from the mainstream with each step. I mean, Ministry are basically a heavy metal band! And that led me from there into things like Zoviet France and that Spanish band - TGTV or something. Esplendico Geometrico. Still quite rhythmic. Brume, I found quite early on/ I just listened to that stuff for years. A lot of it was on cassettes, because I had to copy it from friends, I didn't know where to buy any of it, but I managed to find quite a few people on my University campus who made copies for me and then I slowly started to find ways [to buy it]. I found Soleilmoon first I think. Then when I moved to Ireland, for some reason there were a couple of shops that actually had [these records] in the shop, which was quite a novelty. I used to find a lot of Zoviet France, and Controlled Bleeding, Asmus Tietchens records...for some reason, they stocked them all. There were two shops, and one of them was Tower Records! They must have had a guy working for them that was a fan. He kept it all himself. The other one was a small record store. I was quite lucky as far as discovering things.

EP So you listened to all this industrial music. Were you ever a fan of what I would call the classical electro-acoustic, like Francois Bayle, Pierre Schaeffer, or Pierre Henry?

PM Not until much later. Pierre Henry I didn't really discover until I moved to France, which was only in 1996. I knew he existed but I hadn't really listened to any of his stuff. Hadn't looked into Schaeffer or any of the contemporary acousmatic school, Bayle and that lot. And even now I don't listen to too much of that. I have listened to a lot of Schaeffer and Henri for historical education purposes.

EP Did you discover Roger Doyle in Dublin?

PM I did come across him, I think before I went to Dublin, through a friend. I looked around but I didn't see a lot of his records there, and I never knew a lot about his work. I heard the long radio piece, *Babel*. I don't think I've ever listened to it all the way through.

EP How did you go from being a fan of this music to becoming a musician?

PM I was always a musician as well in other schools, I think I knew that I wanted to...I can't remember when the point came where I thought I might like to make this stuff, but I do remember the process of knowing that I wanted to start constructing sound-works, and wondering how and when I was going to be able to do it. And I remember it was quite a

while between that thought, and when I actually got round to devising the means to start doing work. I remember walking around Paris specifically. I got there in 1996. Just hearing very specific – and I think this was my first links with field recording work that I ended up working with. Actually it wasn't quite, but anyway...just hearing sounds, and thinking I'd really like to just find a way to capture that, and capture this, and just very simply construct things just from those. I wasn't thinking about manipulation or anything. Just taking those sounds and layering them up. Somehow in my head they formed these bright, coherent and rhythmic structures.

EP This was after taking a walk through Paris?

PM Yes, I remember specifically wandering in front of a Government building that had these vents leading down into its bowels, right at street level. And I would walk by that, and there would be amazing sort of pulsing, breathing ventilation sounds pouring out of it. And I always thought I really wanted to record that. This was when I couldn't be buying DAT recorders and this was before mini-discs, which was my eventual way in. It was before digital technology was affordable. I could have gone with a tape recorder, I suppose.

EP So you knew what you wanted, in a way, in advance. You had this moment of epiphany almost.

PM Yes, I knew what I wanted, and I just had to find a way to do it. It was the same thing as a fan of music. I remember thinking in my early discovery days, the moment when I suddenly realised that anything I could imagine wanting to hear – somebody had done! And if I looked hard enough, I could find it. And that's what it was, in those stages. When I heard Zoviet France for the first time, it was – that's exactly what I was looking for! What can I think of next? I started thinking about looking for things more heavily constructed out of real sounds. As I said before, that was probably my first conscious link to field recording work. Thinking that these sounds that we hear all the time and ignore, that's what I want to hear in music. And then finding it!

EP Interesting...in a way, it sounds like you're saying your imagination was one step ahead of hearing the music. You imagined it existing, and then later on you went and discovered it, or at least found something that was a close match.

PM Yes. It was always like a challenge. What can I go looking for next? And how long is it going to take me to find it? But the key was that it was always there. Somebody else had always thought of it first and done it.

EP What form did your first experiments take?

PM My very first experiments with sound were while I was in Paris in the context of my studies. I was studying theatre, which I had studied at University. But I was in Paris for two years to study physical theatre. We had an opportunity on several occasions to perform live sound for pieces, performance pieces that we were working on. And they tended to be acoustic instruments or percussion. Even the first ones I did were centred around traditional Irish instruments, whistles and percussion and bodhrán and spoons and things. But we had one project in our final year. The performance works we were working on were more abstracted, ethereal and mysterious. In that context, looking for live sound to accompany these performances, for the first time I started to join those works with the experimental music that I'd been listening to for years. So I borrowed a guitar amplifier and a delay pedal and a cheap clip-on tie mic, and started creating live sound-scapes just with instruments for these performances. And that was the first time I took steps towards linking those worlds for myself.

EP It was quite a bold step to do it live in that way. Was it just you solo, or were there other people?

PM It was just me. It was a big performance group, but I took myself out of the performances, for that performance. I didn't appear on stage at all. I actually carved out a little backstage area for myself and set up tons of bowls of water and just bits of metal and the instruments, and percussion, and just this cheap mic. It was kind of comforting for me because I was – in those contexts, it's usually very stressful to present yourself forward on stage, so it was kind of a nice little respite, after two years of theatre work. To just hide away and make these noises.

EP Was there a narrative meaning to the performance, that you were trying to support with the sound, or was it quite abstract?

PM It was basically a series of short pieces that the students would have come up with. There was work on melodramatic choruses, or tragic choruses like Greek choruses, but in

modern contexts and with modern texts. And then something that they called *The Mystères*, which was unearthly constructions and beings and scenarios that were less narrative and more visceral. And it was those links specifically that I was able to add to, with sound. And also just to link all these small bits together into something of a more coherent whole as a show, as a performance.

EP Because your sound would be running continuously, I assume, even though the performances were quite bitty...

PM Yes, and as it would shift from one thing to another, the sound might shift. I also actually, now I remember, had a few live mics set up on stage to capture the sounds the performers were making. That was the feedback that I got anyway, that it was making the show into a coherent whole.

EP Could you see what they were doing?

PM I could...just about, from the wings. I put myself in a place where I could [see]. I was taking cues off them too. It wasn't just a background soundtrack, it was all quite linked to the direct action on stage.

EP What happened after that, did you start making some tape experiments?

PM After those studies finished I moved to London and almost immediately one of the first things I did was buy a minidisc recorder. They'd just come on the market. And a small stereo mic. And that's when, for the first time, I put this old – for me – the old idea into practice, of going around and capturing these sounds that I was hearing out in the street or wherever, and trying to work with those. Just with those, I had to borrow a cassette four-track and some borrowed effects pedals for guitars, and I started just experimenting with composing with those sounds. At the same time the reason I came to London was to work with people I'd studied with in Paris, to form a theatre company. So I was performing with that company but also composing the soundtracks for our shows. We did two shows in two years, the first one for which I did a pre-recorded soundtrack and the second one similar to the project I was talking about when I was at school in France, I performed live. This time I performed the soundtrack live on stage and acted a role, a sort of narrator role to the show as well. The sound objects were set up in a more aesthetic way. And that became part of the character as well, the manipulation of the space through sound. At the same time, all along with that, I was considering my work with these new [things]- my first steps in field recording that I was doing, and they were working their way into the shows.

EP It seems that right from the start you intended to manipulate the field recordings that you were gathering...

PM I think by the time I actually got the means to capture the recordings – yes, I was thinking towards manipulation. The first things I did were very loopy. Not rhythmic in a seried and musically rhythmic way, but just in the capture of small fragments of sound that I quite liked out of a less interesting recording. I would create a soundscape out of those small bits.

EP This evolved over time into what you're doing now, these quite sophisticated treatments of very long stretches of sound.

PM Yes, I've moved away from the loops I suppose, or the short loops. I can still loop a few minutes of a recording just to carry on with a particular texture over time.

EP In quite a short space of time you've evolved this quite coherent method of working.

PM I guess so. I think it because I was, like you say, I had the ideas first before I had the means. So it was quite a natural progression to follow.

EP With your work now, do you ever use the computer to process tapes?

PM I've started using the computer for the first time ever, for my radio show (ie *Framework* on Resonance 104.4 FM in London). As of yet, I haven't used it at all for any of my sound work. Although using it in my radio show I'm starting to see ways in which I might want to use it. I've sort of avoided it up till now. Not really out of a dogmatic hate of the laptop – probably partially out of that – but because up to now I've found that everything I've wanted to do I could do with what I have. I started with a four-track, I upgraded to an eight-track and a minidisc, which is now broken which is another reason that I might need to start using multi-tracking. I've gone from a cassette four-track and two guitar effects pedals to digital eight-track rack effects unit and several EQ modules. So it hasn't changed much so far.

EP I think, certainly with the *They Were Dreaming They Were Stones* record, it does come across that the effects processing is almost invisible. What comes over is the content, whatever it is you're trying to communicate.

PM I think another thing over time, as far as manipulation, the processing has been less to do with changing the sound itself and more to do with how the sound is used. More things like layering and delays or strata of the same sound, but without actually changing the quality. I mean, I recorded the sound because it was interesting to begin with...why would I want to lose the qualities of it? So just [working] with an EQ and certain effects of layering, in that instance, is mostly what I did. Most of the sounds, however much they're cut and spliced and multiplied, are exactly how they sounded in the real world. Pretty much anything on that album.

EP When you're doing this layering, like for example the roar of jet engines next to the roar of a football crowd, are you looking for sonic similarities between the two things?

PM I think I look for things that complement one another. So for instance, with that example, the drone of that airplane cabin was quite low and rumbly and grainy and airy in a way. And the football victory celebrations, which are actually not voices but car horns in a square in North London, a very Turkish neighbourhood, and after they won some match in whatever the last World Cup was, I sat in the park, it was in Newington Green in North London. I sat in the middle of the park and then the vehicles were just circling the green, and their cars in a big train circling, leaning on their horns the whole way! That's what all those sounds were, which were very high-pitched and tonal, and the high-pitched tonal chorus of horns quite complemented the grainy rumble of the [cabin]. So it's in listening to one sound and saying, well what's going to bring out its qualities and what will it bring out the qualities of, and contrast well, without them becoming muddy. So that's what I look for.

EP Is the site and the precise instance where you made the recording important to you?

PM That's an interesting question, because up till now I've always insisted on including quite detailed notes, or at least including the specifics of what all the sounds are on the liner notes for the CD. That's why, presumably, you know that they were football victory celebrations. On the one hand, what's important to me about the sounds is their sonic quality, specifically. As far as listening to the sound, it's not the context that interests me at all. In fact, I'm trying to remove them from those associations, and just present them as a sonic event that you can hear in its own right. But on the other hand, almost in support of that fact, and I think maybe on a more intellectual and less visceral level, I find it fascinating and really interesting to know after the fact where the origin of those sounds is. And also as an artist, to give that specific human link to the situation in which it was recorded. So when asked, I always say I prefer that somebody listen first and maybe listen several times, and maybe only once they know the piece really well, and have created their own context for it in their own mind, that they then go and read the liner notes, and have what I hope becomes a giddy pleasure in finding out. 'Is that what that is?' And some people find that contradictory that I do that, because if it doesn't matter where the sound came from, then why do you need to write it down? But I think they really support one another. I mean the fact that it's not at all what you expected really supports the fact that it doesn't matter where it came from.

EP You see Chris Watson, who I have a lot of respect for, as is well known is very scrupulous and meticulous about detailing where he captures every single recording. But that's because, to him, it's extremely important where and when they came from. He's very much into this sense of place.

PM But he also, I think, much more presents his work in a documentary fashion. Not to say that he doesn't present it as his own art, but I've spoken to him about this as well, and I think the fact that it is more like a documentary photograph of a place, it is very important to know exactly where and when. And I love the fact that he gives time of day, all of that kind of measuring. Whereas with what I'm doing, I don't at all feel that the soundscapes I'm creating are referential or documentary in any way. But I do feel that it's important for me to present a personal link to the sound. I remember once somebody being very confused about the fact that there was a recording from the inside of a car vent, that was used in a composition. And I chose to list it as 'air vent inside a red Austin mini'. And not only does the make of the car obviously not matter, but the colours! – But to me, it wasn't at all irrelevant, the fact was that I was presenting my human link to where that sound came from. And to me that was very important. Not to map the sound within its human context, but present the sound within my human and artistic existence. Very personal, personal is what it always seems to me.

EP When you just said that about Chris Watson, I thought maybe there's a slightly more imaginative component to what you do.

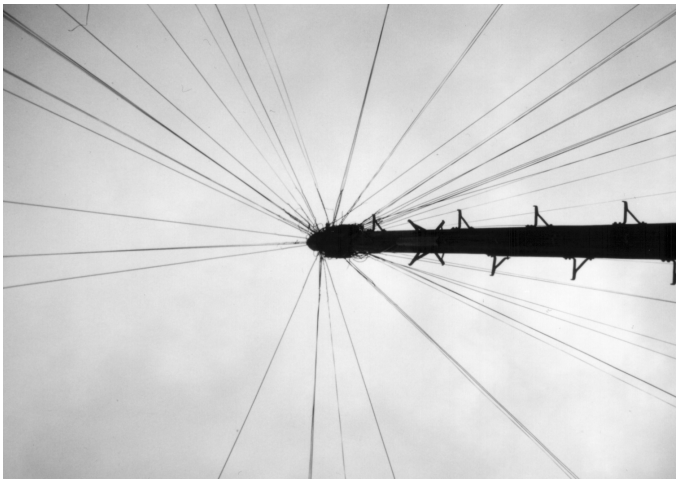
PM I think we're just using sound differently, and our purposes are different. I'm in a way being more selfish, because I'm taking these sounds and saying I don't care where they came from, I want to use them for my purposes. Whereas Chris is very much presenting them and saying, look at the amazing things that exist in the world. And I think that's very noble. It's fantastic.

EP What other records have you issued?

PM The one on Staalplaat, that was the first one. That was self-titled. There was another one on an Italian CDR label called S'Agita Recordings, which is curated by a couple called Paulo and Laura who have a project called Logoplasm together, which is fantastic...really recommend their work. That release was called *Eyes Like A Fish*. That was the second one. The third one was *Definition*, which was on Absurd. And then *They Were Dreaming They Were Stones*, which was on Ground Fault. The first 50 copies I think came with a three-inch CD called *Elements*. That's it so far, that's all the solo stuff. There are various compilation tracks.

EP Do you have any views on being brought into the Ground Fault agenda...bracketed with these other musicians you may not have anything in common with, packaged in a similar way...

PM I've thought about Ground Fault's division system. In a way I kind of like the way Ground Fault does it, because it makes no concessions, it's just 1, 2 or 3! It's Quiet, Medium



or Loud! They don't try to get everything right. They say, these are the categories we have, and everything's going to have to go in there somewhere. I don't take it too seriously. In a way it's good, because a lot of what he releases is unknown to anyone and it is good for me to be able to look at what he's got out and personally...imagine I'm going to be more interested in the 'ones', maybe some of the '2's, occasionally a '3'. I was also quite surprised to find my album was a '1', because in my world it's not particularly quiet! But when you hear some of his '3's you can understand why it becomes a 1! As far as his packaging goes, he has this format where everything pretty much looks the same, but I also quite appreciate the fact that he also gives free rein over the inside of the booklet to the artist to do what they want. I know I'm not the first one to use that basically as an alternate cover. So my copies of that record are turned inside out. He's a great guy, and I like a lot of what's come out on that label.

EP How long have you been doing your show on Resonance?

PM Not quite since the very beginning. Resonance started in May of – God knows what year, 2002? And we started our show beginning of June. At first I was doing it with another guy called Joel Stern, who actually released a record with Michael Northam in the same Ground Fault batch. We did the show together for not quite a year, he then went back to Australia. He's done stuff for the TwoThousandAnd label and he's now co-curating a label called Naturestrip. The two CDs I have on Naturestrip are great. I haven't heard the toshiya tsunoda one, the most recent one, but I've read the reviews. Originally the show was fortnightly, now doing almost weekly broadcasts. If there's something specific I want to play, I ask [the label] for it. Most of it just gets sent to me. I write a pretty detailed playlist that gets around, even though many of them probably don't get an opportunity to listen to the show, a lot of artists know that it's there. So they send me things, and they certainly know about Resonance. As far as they're concerned it's a good place to get some exposure.

EP I always say this, but what interests me about all the people you've named, and indeed lots of people working in this area, is how every single one of them can take a similar – or an identical – sound-source, and come up with something quite unique, which is uniquely their own. I've been sent a record by Jason Kahn from Switzerland, who has also used the sound inside an airplane cabin. It's called *Songs For Nicholas Ross* on Rossbin. It punctuates these other sound episodes. I assume it's him flying back and forth across the world, on his international jet-setting life, and his recordings of the cabin are quite different to your use of it.

PM Well, I mean apart from two different artists using the sound differently, I'll bet his airplane sounded very different from my airplane! I think it comes down to the personal aspect of it. Obviously, even if we all had [the same recording] – as often happens, people will exchange sounds – it always comes out different. In the same way that a hundred people with a trumpet will play a completely different song, a hundred different people with an airplane will come up with different recordings. It's just a different kind of instrument.

EP Do you ever do anything in a live context?

PM Yes, I have done. I've played quite a lot of concerts and kind of gone back and forth between using just my field recordings, or trying to incorporate live sound sources, particularly when I've been performing within a theatre context, I've used more live sound sources and less pre-recorded sources. I'm at a point now where I'm less interested in continuing to just go on stage with a bunch of recordings and playing them back. I'm using raw field recordings that I'll construct live, but don't quite see the interest in that over listening to a CD. In the context of the diffusion of the electro-acoustic set and presenting it in its proper context with a proper audio system, I suppose I can appreciate simply doing a live playback. But also, coming from a theatre background, and as a live musician, I want there to be something special about a live concert. I want there to be something live about a live performance! I've been thinking about ways to incorporate live, found sounds and found objects; live field captures, in a way. Ultimately, in presenting things more in an installation context as opposed to a concert. I am definitely interested in doing an art gallery installation. That is something I'm just starting to really think about. It's something that I hope to be doing within this next year [ie 2005].

EP Do you have a visual component in mind that you would use?

PM I have been working a lot with photographs lately. Still photographs. Might be trying to think of a way to work them together. I also have a plan with a painter friend of mine to do a collaborative gallery project. She does very abstract landscapes, but from very specific locations as an inspiration for them. Quite beautiful and vast. She actually approached me and asked if I'd be interested in doing some sort of sound and painting project, for a single painting and a single sound piece inspired by a specific location. I don't know how that would be presented, but we'll be working on that hopefully in the next year. [In art galleries], sound often seems to be coupled with video. Which I like less, I think. I find it really distracting. Putting up some random visuals while you're playing a concert is something I never can fathom. So the idea of sound being coupled with a still image or an immobile structure may be something I'm more interested in. Something to meditate on I suppose. I quite appreciate Francisco López's method of just giving you a

face mask and turning out the lights! It works really well, with his material. You really are able to get lost in the sound, and that's what I want from a live performance. Again, there's certainly nothing live about [his method], he just hides himself away with two CD players, but he creates a context for it.

EP Do you know John Grzinich?

PM I don't know John. I've had contact with him in the context of recordings for Framework. He's a good friend of Michael's, so I sort of feel I know him.

EP There's something quite metaphysical about what Michael Northam's doing. It's very hard to grasp. Even he himself can't really articulate it fully.

PM I think that's the point. It's not really articulable in language what Michael's all about.

EP I think the thing he shares in common with jgrzinich is there's always some document happening which they try and document in sound, and it's often a very strange event. I think they've even gone to the lengths of having some kind of ceremony performed with friends, almost like a musical improvisation, playing sticks and stones in the woods or something.

PM What we have talked about that I most identify with in his work and my work, is Michael's idea of time-stretching. Creating a suspension of time via music, for a listener. Again, it's the same thing with Francisco and his face masks. Being able to listen to a piece and be removed from your current physical reality, really get immersed in it and lose yourself in it. Michael describes that as time-stretching. I can identify with that.

EP But it's not the studio meaning of time-stretching, which is where you extend a tape by use of varispeed.

PM No, it's a metaphysical meaning.

EP I think where you have succeeded, with your new record, is in allowing the listener to hear the world anew. It's sound that appears to be familiar, and yet it really does surprise the listener.

PM I've been working a lot more lately with completely unmanipulated recordings. The last piece I've been working on is just had-edited on the minidisc player, raw recordings. It's quite a different direction from everything I've done, but it shares those qualities of presenting these sounds out of their context and in a musical form.

EP In terms of quantity of stuff that you have to listen to, in order to get to a finished product, and the time you spend listening to it, what would be the ratio of how much you have to gather and process to make one composition?

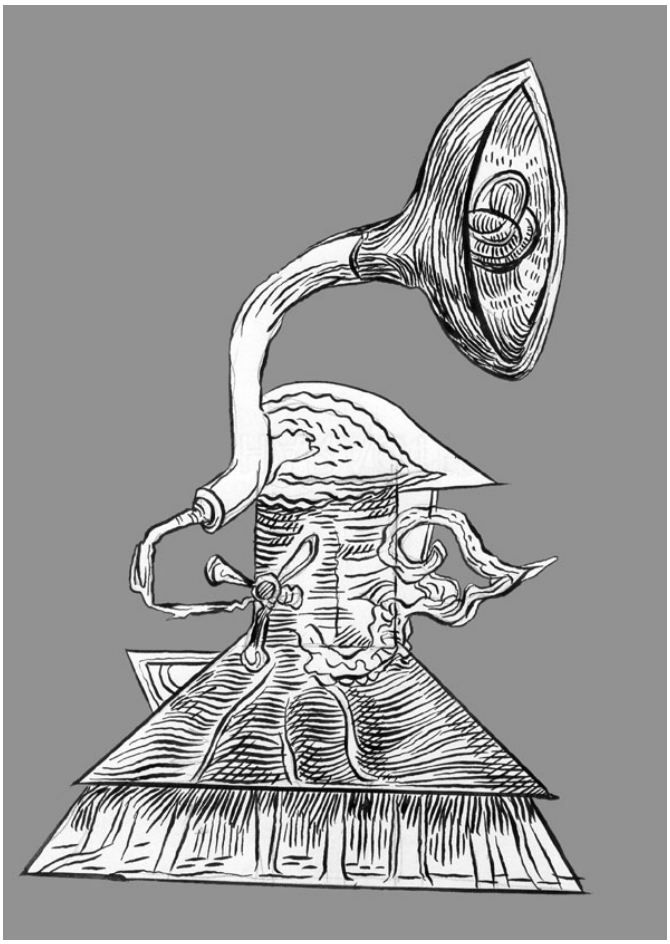
PM Oh, it completely depends. Sometimes I might have one 3-minutes recording that's so amazing that I can do a half-hour piece out of it. Or I might have a month's worth of field recordings from Paris that have been cut down to a 14-minute piece. It depends on the sound itself, and it depends on how it ends up getting used. Sometimes I'll take a recording that just demands to be used a certain way, and sometimes I'll be working on a piece and I'll want a sound that has a certain quality and I'll have to go back to the archives and look for something. Certainly, it's only a tiny fraction of my archives of recordings that have found their way into a composition. I must have about a hundred discs full of sound recordings and only a very small amount of them have made their way onto the four CDs. I've started to feel like I need to – somewhere deep in my mind I'm hesitant to continue making more recordings, because there's so much that when I listen back to it, I think well, gotta use that! How have I not done anything with that? So I make new recordings and think, is that gonna just get lost in the pile? Which is silly, because of course at the same time I hear something I want I'm going to record it. But I do need to find the time to go back over five year's worth of recordings and pull things out.

EP Are you connected with the people who do the Phonography CDRs?

PM In a way. It's a loose collective, and I'm part of the collective. They're not based anywhere. It started out as a Yahoo group mailing list. There was a group called lower case sound online, and it was there many years ago that somebody suggested, because there was quite a large and specific activity of people interested in field recording amongst a wider circle of interests in the lower case group. And it was suggested that a field recording group be started and that's how it happened. The person who has released the phonography.org compilations, Dale Lloyd, is in Seattle. He runs AND/OAR records. The person who maintains the phonography.org website is somewhere in California, maybe San Francisco. And then the person who maintains the mailing list, he may actually be in San Francisco as well but the fact is the members are all over the world. And events have started happening in various places all over the world, there's been events in Texas and in New York, in California and Seattle, and there are going to be some in Scotland, although nothing in London so far officially under the Phonography heading. I've been part of that since the group was first started, just on a participatory level, and involved in the compilations. I feel the same way about the Phonography discs that I feel about Chris Watson's work, to a certain extent. I appreciate and I'm very interested in their documentary aspect, and not to remove any artistic intention from it, but they are presenting snapshots in time of sound. It's the sort of amateur group to Chris Watson's professional group, just as far as the technology that's involved. It's an opportunity for people to get things out. Some of it's great. Some of the recordings I may find less fascinating than others, but for the most part I appreciate them. Those discs are what inspired me to be working on these Framework pieces. In presenting these raw recordings but in a more musically structured way, just through editing. They came directly out of listening to the Phonography compilations. □

Phonography: www.phonography.org
Ground Fault: www.groundfault.net
Resonance: www.resonancefm.com

Tape Maschines Maken



Aki Onda
Ancient & Modern
USA PHONOMENA AUDIO ARTS AND MULTIPLES PAAM-020CD CD (2003)

Onda's been an electronic composer and improvising musician for over 10 years; I think he's now based in Brooklyn NYC. This is a CD of cassette-tape compositions, and it's a fairly incredible collection. A frequent traveller, Onda got into the habit – which became an obsession – of making cassette recordings of sounds and ambiences he heard wherever he went. He used a little hand-held device to do it. It became so important he turned it into a project, gave it a name – 'Cassette Memories'. It beats collecting air miles any day.

He liked the way he would 'collect these sounds recklessly, innocently'. Acutely self-aware, he didn't even know why he was doing it. There was no intention, at first, to use these tapes to make them into a musical statement of any kind. He looked around one day and found he had practically built up a 'diary of sound', as he calls it. He also found he was running out of storage space for these little beasts, which were accumulating quicker than dead cockroaches in a NYC apartment. In an act of recycling that would delight Friends of the Earth, he started to make new sounds out of old. He decided to start putting the tapes together and got lost in the process; he 'layered new sounds onto them', and attained 'some incredible sonic collages that just invented themselves'.

That last bit is pure modesty on his part, of course. In the hands of a gifted creator like Onda, it might seem easy. Anyone else could take their stack of home recordings and treat 'em likewise. They'd likely end up with a sprawling mess of noise. They could even use the same materials as Onda, and it would end up badly. What seems to be most important, more so than the process really, is how Onda's personal life (his memories, his travels) has become inscribed into the music you hear. 'Entangled' is the word he uses for it; it happens in a highly effective and natural way, and this lack of contrivance is wonderful and refreshing.

To listen to, this CD is – well, glorious…layers and layers of looped sounds, odd unrepeatable patterns emerging, shimmering rhythms, moments of pure magic. This powerful music and sound-art is filled with nostalgia, packed with events, moment and gravity. Where some lesser creators, having hooked into a new 'gimmick' for making distinctive-sounding music, might feel content to repeat themselves, Onda demonstrates lots of varied methods in the tracks released here. Where 'One Day' is a dense kaleidoscopic mass, 'Eclipse' is more obviously fragmented. The former uses lots of loops to build up a very deep sound image,

the latter uses distressed tapes, vaguely open-air recordings, moments of action in an urban setting. 'Eclipse' also shows the exciting way that Onda is joining the sounds together; the 'meanings' of the original events have been emptied out, in favour of purely sonic associations – matches of tone, texture, timbre, and so forth.

In 'Flickering Lights', we hear the way that the coarse-grained, approximate quality of the cassette tape has been made into a positive virtue, along with a few backwards tapes and further loops; this one is somewhat reminiscent of William Basinski and his *Disintegration Loops*. 'Voice' is one of the more uncanny statements here; a looped fragment of voice is put together with an urban bricolage, with its sudden shifts of time and place suggesting a jagged journey in an impossible dimension. 'Dream' is another magnificent and powerful piece; far from depicting a wispy and ethereal daydream, this is a deep Surrealist fantasy made real, an eerie drum-propelled odyssey across fields of strange sounds and fantastical pulsing rhythms. Incredibly beautiful. The final track 'Last' is where he pulls out all the stops, and shows you the full extent to which he's capable of crafting his material into something new, vital and vibrant. An incredible assemblage, layers of amazing sound; the use of ultra fast-forward tapes, creating a string of far-out gibberish speech, is the least impressive part of it.

Add to all this a sumptuous CD package which is assembled like a mini gatefold LP cover; artwork is pasted on boards, and a great collage design adorns it. You rarely encounter such greatness; I will certainly start looking for the other CD by this fellow. Certifiable genius.

ED PINSENT 20/11/2004
www.phonomena.com

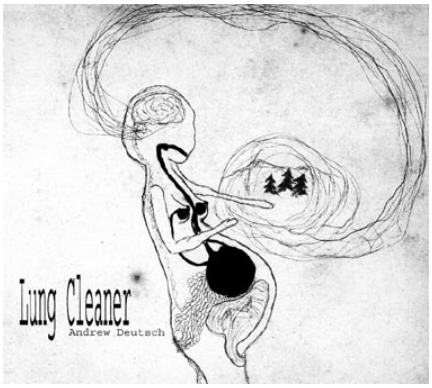
The Loop Orchestra
Not Overtly Orchestral
GERMANY QUECKSILBER 5 CD (2004)

This interesting Australian combo received notice in issue 5 or 6 of TSP for their CD *The Analogue Years*, which documented their tape-loop doings in the mid to late 1990s. Their 1990 vinyl LP *Suspense* already commands a handsome sum from collectors, but that's vinyl for you. The collective nature of this bunch allows for shifting line-ups, but those responsible for present disc were John Blades, Richard Fielding, Patrick Gibson, Hamish MacKenzie and Emmanual Gasparinatos. As name indicates, tape loop manipulation is their game – reel to reel playback and carefully chosen segments of music and sound to perform 'live' musique concrète in real time. The ever-repeating loops create intensive whirlpools, spinning effects – a divine vortex – and overall result does more than mesmerise listener, it induces cataleptic trance. And of course, due to 'plasticity' of the medium and the technique, I suppose the tapes must stretch, slip and misfire - hence everything goes slightly off the rails in a gentle and pleasing way, much like a rickety tram ride through Melbourne.

Of the four cuts here, 3 were performed live and recorded in period 1998-2001; 'Radiophony' is a tribute to work of the BC Radiophonic Workshop, both in sound and in method one presumes. The last one is something really special, a unique 2003 event for Anthony Mannix and a radio commission by the Australian Broadcasting Company. The loops are more 'directed' somehow, arranged within a semi-narrative trajectory and exhibit great sense of purpose. This highly creative work fairly crackles with tension and expectation as one exciting sound is overlapped by another; it has a real 'jungle' feel, jabbering tribesmen, bird calls, rainfall, native drums…a strong work.

The organic-ish approach of The Loop Orchestra compares favourably with the way that similar effects are obtained in the digital realm, where computers with the 'copy and paste' facility allow the facile copying of large sections of data – frequently resulting in boring, mechanical rhythms. Here, it's totally different – real objects are involved, not virtual ones; and the varied repetitions are happening in real time and in a much more exciting way. Not a great title for this disc, and the cover's a bit disappointing too – found graphics, old engravings with a circus theme, acrobats and balancing acts on wires made of tape loops – all rather literal; but the music is recommended to anyone who loves Pierre Schaeffer, Philip Jeck and maybe even Terry Riley.

ED PINSENT 05/10/2004
www.quecksilber-music-com
www.thelooporchestra.com



Andrew Deutsch
Lung Cleaner
USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM 26 CD (2003)

Another winner from this virtually unclassifiable 'lone wolf' of modern sound art…after some time spent in the company of his 'patron' Eric Lanzillotta, Deutsch sees fit to dedicate his sensational 'newie' to that same man who has sponsored more than one release under his Anomalous Records imprint. As sleeve note clarifies, Deutsch is no mere electronica hack; he's a 'digital artist' these days. I've always enjoyed his unusual blends, like for example his mixing of nature recordings with old crackly records, gentle noise, strange instruments and stuff. Now he's really piling it on – the old 'quiet' Andrew D seems to be a thing of the past, and he's socking it to us with his new 'tough guy' image. Listen to 'Nice Day, Some Rain', if you think you're man enough…it's a huge montage of sweeping, heavy tones, with lurching digital groans and unstoppable bouts of chatter. In fine, a queasy bewildering mixage. No longer content with the limitations of Mother Nature, Deutsch manufactures his own world and fills it with beasts from his own private menagerie…

In 'Dizzy from the Cold Meds', nothing will do but he must make samples of Pauline Oliveros music and re-present them in new artistic frame. Three compositions from this Grand Dame of 1960s electronic music are selected and reinscribed into this new composition…La Oliveros herself would probably swoon with surprise at the results here, an intense and very slow collision of paranoid-sounding moans, animalistic howlings and oscillating dimensions of solid weirdness. This one's a strong, muscular mix…quite intoxicating in its density. No matter where you take a bite out of it, each chunk is full of tasty materials, like sonic nougat filled with raisins and almonds. After some four minutes, the use of Oliveros samples is more noticeable, but they are reflected through the looking-glass...our horizons are constantly shifting, and create a truly uncertain atmosphere.

'Coughing The Lung Cleaner' might almost be the title of a lost Henri Chopin sound-poem (you know him, and his *bronches*!) but instead proves to be a grisly, alarming shocker, a real bone-and-metal rattler. With its use of gears, water, musical boxes and wineglasses, it's an

infernal machine in perpetual motion. It recalls the grotesque figurines made by Damon Bisciglia (who recorded as Agog on this same label; one of his sculptures was spotted among collections of Lanzillotta). This piece sounds how those figurines look. It probably connects to drawing on cover, which evokes an X-Ray view of woman and her vital organs, intimately plugged into the US northwestern landscape by means of psychic ectoplasm. If all this be true, 'Coughing The Lung Cleaner' could offer holistic cures to many physical and psychological ailments, but said cures will undoubtedly be painful. Only 'Sleep Fields (go to sleep)' offers any form of respite on this somewhat frenetic and saturnine release. Deutsch's notion of sleep fields is that they are sites where odd dreams abound, caused by unfamiliar sounds heard in forest by night. Climax Golden Twins used same motto GO TO SLEEP on their great CD, *Lovely*, a similar dream-inducing artifact of sound…quotes of quotes…heck, the man's done it again. This is his best release yet, I would say.

ED PINSENT 20/10/2004
PO Box 22195, Seattle, WA 98122-0195, USA
www.anomalousrecords.com

Akira Rabelais
Spellewauerynsherde
UNITED KINGDOM
SAMADHISOUND SOUND CD
SS03 CD (2004)

An odd one here, by a composer based in Los Angeles I never heard of before, released on David Sylvian's label; said mystery-man composer (even his very nationality is hard to pin down) maintains somewhat aloof position through several distancing strategies, not least of which is wrapping his every utterance within cryptic, cross-contextual references to impossibly obscure sources. Added to which the package, designed by Sylvian himself, comes over as precious, solemn and deeply pretentious; so what the heck am I doing with this in my house? As it turns out, the music is fairly sumptuous and has its moments of beauty; admittedly most of the beauty is coming from the original singing voices that have been sampled by Rabelais, but his arrangements don't lack for interest. But we're getting slightly ahead of ourselves…

The composer discovered a cache of lost / obscure / unreleased recordings, of field recordings of 'traditional Icelandic accapella lament songs recorded in the late 1960s or early 1970s on Ampex tapes and then forgotten about'. He was hard at work digitizing the music for a library. Clearly touched by something, perhaps the deep spiritual / religious content of what he heard, or simply the constrained emotion within the gorgeous voices, Akira used the recordings as the basis of the compositions hereon. What he effectively does is re-present the original work, using modern technology, not to make a frame for the original music but rather to make a new compositional statement. Exactly what that statement may be is something for listeners to determine for themselves. One suspects it's more about him than about the music; Rabelais may share that narcissistic streak that David Sylvian has made one of his distinctive promotional traits. Who can forget his gloriously self-regarding video for the single 'Red Guitar'? Believe me, I've tried…

The sounds on disc are admittedly pretty haunting. He uses filters, editing, post-production. When you first put it on, it's quite breathtaking; you hear this near-perfect singing voice, struggling to make its way through a wall of filters and treatments, as though it had literally been rescued from the past. Quite a unique effect, although not entirely unfamiliar to those familiar with remastered old 78 rpm records, for example. Further tracks here perform clever and careful layering operations, to put the voices out of step with each other and create a semi-atonal 'virtual' polyphonic choir in the hard drive. Elsewhere, unconnected performances are brought together, to create an uncertain echoing or ghostly, spectral effects. The voices are enhanced with very minimal ambient drones / music, sound effects, and gently shushing wind sounds – presumably original elements contributed by Rabelais. The treatments get more extreme on tracks 3 and 4 (don't ask me for titles, for heaven's sake), producing microtonal events almost on a par with the work of Ligeti – all done inside the computer, of course.

Supplied with the package are titles, themselves supported with additional texts, which I take to be penned by Akira in order to provide yet more contextual layers. They are bewildering; a mixture of old English, medieval French and modern English, with catalogue numbers (of what?) and strange fragments of poetry. The triple-gatefold sleeve design, impeccably printed, is a product of patron Sylvian's hands and is a collage of carefully-selected 'distressed' images, including a Madonna icon, arranged to suggest something about ancientness, religious devotion, loneliness perhaps (the setting for everything is an empty room). Akira might, in high moments of self-importance, regard himself as a holy visionary, like St John of the Cross, speaking in obscure riddles; this record hints at forms of religious transcendence, nostalgia, vaguely identified 'celestial harmonies'. Whether listener chooses to enter the cathedral of Rabelais' mind is your own decision, but there's certainly a lot of information to puzzle over. Might appeal to lovers of John Dowland, or Hildegard of Bingen. In fact, I'm rather surprised that David Tibet hasn't shown an interest yet.

ED PINSENT 31/10/2004
www.samadhisound.com

Francesco Michi
Sound Reportage
ITALY ANTS ANT07CDR CD (2003)

Many are the long and winding roads that one must sometimes travel in search of a rewarding aural experience, filled as they are with numerous blind alleys and elusive dead-ends. This only serves to make those rare occasions when you manage to navigate the maze-like structure of record company publicity and hand-me-down knowledge somewhat akin to a revelation. After many hours listening to yet more of your standard computer dross, and countless sleepless nights wondering if I would ever be able to take pleasure in an album again I stumbled across this little gem.

The gem in question is the work of Francesco Michi, an Italian stallion residing in Firenze, and is the product of many years labour. Much of its gem-like quality I suspect derives from the fact that before Michi embarked on a study of electroacoustic composition he paid his dues in the hallowed halls of philosophy. Michi has approached the sonic problem from many angles including performance, installation and sound sculpture. In 1982 he founded FORMAT, a group of like-minded Ginos and Ginas driven by the twin prongs of finding creative applications for the use of technology, especially the lo-fi variety, and the studying of the surrounding acoustic environment.

Much of the spirit of that investigation informs this album. You shouldn't be put off at all by the clean, white-and-red Italian racing lines of the cover because what is contained within is dirty, sick and quietly beautiful. You should also take no notice of the fact that Michi studied electroacoustic composition because the sound here has little in common with that particular institutional science. With the aid of little more than a cassette recorder minus the erase head and a Commodore 64, Michi has fashioned a group of 'altered' field recordings that wonderfully capture the soundscape of certain environments and proves to be true the adage that it isn't the size of your tools that count, but how you use them.

The recordings here cover a period of five

years, mostly made in Italy, but the opening track is from an experimental music festival in Munich, and the last track was recorded in Greece. Michi likes to think of these aptly named 'sound reportages' as reflections on memory, in which new experiences can magnify or erase memories of previous ones, as happens here to the environmental sounds courtesy of the cassette recorder's missing erase head. With all the overlapping of events I think they could equally be thought of as small musings on the notion of time and its apparently relentless march forward.

They also just happen to be fantastic snapshots of a time and place. Indeed 'snapshots' seems to be the best available metaphor: the tracks are very much like a succession of audible pictures taken of a certain environment, which are then shuffled about and presented in a somewhat random order. They build up an image of the 'sound' of their respective environments amazingly well. Sounds overlap, merge, re-appear in the background, and generally bleed into each other in surprising ways. To add to this confusion Michi reports that for a truly faithful rendition of the sound reportage experience each track should be listened to as a loop.

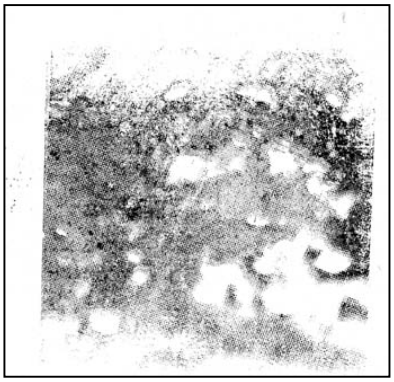
The variety of sounds presented here is just too complex to begin to describe, everything imaginable of a particular environment seems to turn up, although the small snatches of music that squeeze through seem to be a linking factor of sorts. Everything is bathed in a glorious analogue hiss thanks to Michi's tape recorder that adds its own layer of filth to events, and makes no apologies for doing so. To think that Michi has conjured up an album of such richness with the simplest of tools is astounding With these he has given us a document of more depth than is normally manifested in the entire careers of many of his lacklustre contemporaries.

ARON ROBERTSON
Via Filippo de Grenet 26, 00128 Roma, Italia
ants.rec@silenzio-distribuzione.it
www.silenzio-distribuzione.it/ants.htm

Coelacanth
The Glass Sponge
USA 23FIVE 004 CD (2003)

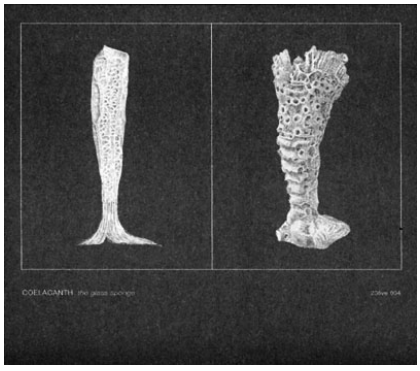
These two guys are Loren Chasse and Jim Haynes. Once again as Coelacanth they manage to produce something translucently beautiful, and have the single-mindedness needed to sustain such extreme forms of sound art. Continuing with considerable tenacity to plough their furrow, they explore further the tiny and obscure channel of sound art they have chosen. Like jgrzinich, they too reserve the right to retain a great deal of mystery as to their doings. All we know from this is that it's pretty small-scale; a specialist technician was required, and is credited, to 'rescue sounds that tried very hard to make themselves disappear'. Otherwise, the events documented on *The Glass Sponge* are simply 'unspecified public and private performances'. Make of that what you will.

Having some familiarity with work of Coelacanth (and of their nearest antecedent,



id battery), I usually have this image of the artists at work burrowing like moles in remote and unattractive zones in cities or countryside, depending on their travelcard range…once there, striving hard to locate (perhaps with microscopes) tiny events which can scarcely be said to be happening at all. Said events are captured and subsequently re-engineered into sonic entities. Layer them all together and you have these uncanny products, utterly alien reports from obscure corners, compellingly beautiful, intimate, airless, fully formed. We should note that their work rarely appears to be artificed; it betrays little evidence of human intervention. List of things that are meat and drink to the Coelacanth boys include mould growth, rust stains, pockets of dust, cobwebs, mists rising, peeling paint, decaying foodstuffs, and the gradual erosion of stone by the sea.

Water imagery abounds; yet apparently 'very little water spilled into the recording' of this CD. Of the four tracks, 'The Hexactinellidae' is particularly strange, as though these named monsters are some form of microscopic life teeming in the depths of the ocean, whilst up above on the surface miniature foghorns are blowing. Perhaps these are inhabitants of 'The Leaden Sea', another environment they describe. Ay, it's fascinating enough to sit and contemplate their processes, but the finished recordings unleash a listener's imagination in many unexpected ways; they plum the depths that other music cannot reach. 'The Electric Hydrometer' is more of a portrait of a scientific/magical device used to measure the water, but we're back into sea-faring realms with 'The Violet Shell and its raft', an almost heart-rending episode which seems to paint a portrait of an ocean voyage undertaken by the smallest of vulnerable creatures, against impossible odds, yet still coming through it alive…life endures yet. I never thought about



it before, but Coelacanth is of course the name of a prehistoric fish long thought to be extinct, until specimen was captured in the Chalumna river near South Africa in 1938. In like manner, Jim Haynes and Loren Chasse capture and preserve rare sounds swimming in our own environment thought to be extinct…or in some cases, non-existent!

ED PINSENT 02/10/2004
www.23five.org

Coelacanth
Mud Wall
USA THE HELEN SCARSDALE AGENCY HMS 003 CD (2004)

Here's their other release for this season, a single 58-minute cut. Helen Scarsdale have rescued this release from comparative oblivion of its original obscure issue on the Mystery Sea label. Taken from recordings made at 'a private performance', *Mud Wall* is packaged in layers of opaque, green murk. Three screenprints, half-tone photographs of extremely obscure shapes, are slid into the jewel case. Each card is backed with a puzzling prose or poem piece, alluding to water, minerals, the passage of time…immersion within this 'mudbath' of clues, visual hints and of course sounds is perhaps the best way for anyone to enjoy and understand this unique sound-art entity. As both sources and methods remain cryptic, it's impossible to categorise. The music simply trundles in with gently fascinating waves, rattling, churning and gurgling. Again, without expending reams of useless prose, may I commend this CD to you all very highly. What's most impressive about the 'Canth' is the quantity of air and space that is suggested in these very 'open' recordings of theirs – even more so than in the recent Brett Larner escapade *After School Activity*. Yet at the same time, *Mud Wall* has density and surface. This is the very converse of the often-claustrophobic world of sealed-off, blocked-in digital music. Wonderful, nearly inexplicable sounds; let this duo show you the hidden mysteries of life.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2004
helen@helenscarsdale.com
www.helenscarsdale.com

Alessandro Bosetti, Antje Vowinckel
Charlemagne, la vue attachée sur son lac de Constance, amoureux de l'âbime caché
ITALY BOWINDO 03 CD (2003)

An electro-acoustic composition set here mostly from the hands of Herr Bossetti, who's mostly known for his improvised sax blowing in context of related work by other new German bloods (see Phosphor, Annette Krebs, the *Berlin Reeds* compilation, and his solo improv record this issue), and here exhibiting another interesting side to his musical personality. His first piece, something

to do with geographies and islands, is quite fascinating – at first I thought it was in much same territory as that which Michael Renkel was doing 2-3 years ago, treating improvised recordings in his digital mix-box. But it's nothing of the sort. Bossetti's constructions and collages are decidedly odd, following a logic of arrangement that is perplexing and non-linear. He blends passages of 'pure' electronic sputterings with fragments of sound effects, and even a little bit of his own reed playing, but all put together in an unpredictable mix. Manipulated voices appear midway through this first piece, to vaguely comic effect (some of them are speeded-up voices), hinting – like the elaborate CD title which simultaneously presses so many varied cultural buttons it makes your head spin - at some open-ended 'meaning' in the best possible post-modern way.

If the 'islands' piece is a snapshot of the modern world's exterior, then perhaps the 'kitchen' piece that follows is an interior view. It certainly sounds much more claustrophobic, conveying that 'enclosed', airless effect that results from overly-treated sounds when captured from largely inanimate sound sources. He's used that old stand-by of composers with no ideas – objects found in an everyday kitchen. How often have we heard that one before? Sadly, the sounds on this composition are dull - attempts are made to liven things up with a restless cut-it-up, stop and start approach, but there's too much vague rumbling and clattering to disguise the essential tedium. Interested listeners may wish to compare this with work of The Sonic Catering Band for similarity of 'culinary' theme.

Vowinckel's nine-minute 'text-sound composition' piece finishes up this odd collection. One might be tempted to expect better from a woman who has created new experimental radio plays in her home country. Instead, it's dumb, silly, chaotic nonsense, practically juvenile in its inane and pointless juxtaposition of sounds, which include samples from a PacMan game, and men shouting at each other. No doubt this is saying something quite profound about our inability to communicate effectively in the modern world.

ED PINSENT 21/09/2004
C/o Valerio Tricoli, Via Paolo Costa 3, 40137 Bologna, Italia
www.bowindorecordings.com
www.fringesrecordings.com
www.melgun.net

Stéphane Roy
Migrations
CANADA EMPREINTES DIGITALES IMED 0373 CD (2003)

I've spoken elsewhere about the large, northern land that is Canada; of course I've never actually been there so you might be tempted to take that as a qualification of sorts. It must be a strange thing though, this country neatly divided into French and English-speaking sections. Napoleon was quite happy to sell off his real estate further south and who could blame him, but not so it appears his jewel in the north. This has led to a breed apart, people whom even the French find strange in their desire to eradicate any trace of the Anglo-Saxon from their speech.

Stéphane Roy is one of said Québécois; is he strange? Well it goes without saying doesn't it, being the sort of person that gets involved with music like this. It seems as though Roy recently spent a period living in the American mid-west (St Louis to be exact) and that this had somewhat of an adverse reaction on him, as it would do on many people I'm sure. All this time spent down south had him yearning for the green fields of home, and he has since returned to the motherly bosom of Montréal. This CD, his second for Empreintes Digitales, in part sees him with a newly discovered love for his homeland and a desire to express it. Distance does make the heart grow fonder as they say.

Roy obviously has a fascination with the mystical Trinity: there are three pieces here, each consisting of three separate parts. The first of these pieces, 'Appartenances', is the ode mentioned above to Montréal's diversity and is comprised of three themes entitled 'Celtic', 'Latin' and 'Oriental' respectively. The 'Celtic Theme' has quite obvious reference points, including as it does snippets of bagpipes and marching drums, the likes of which would hardly be out of place at the Edinburgh tattoo. The 'Latin Theme' is a little more obscure; I'm not sure what exactly makes it so although it is fairly rhythmic, as if Latino culture was reducible to such a thing. The 'Oriental Theme' is even stranger still: what better way to summon up the oriental 'aura' of your city than by having somebody recite a Baudelaire poem, in French, about an imaginary place? Verily, I can think of no better way myself.

The next piece on the CD, 'Trois petites histoires concrètes', is a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of musique concrète. I was unaware that we had reduced the invention of musique concrète to a date and time, but perhaps this shows my ignorance. Anyway, all the sections of this piece are dedicated to a particular aspect of Pierre Schaeffer's arcane art: the first to the acousmatic rupturing of sound from its source; the second to what Roy calls 'sound-shooting', a nice way to describe the process of picking up sounds with a microphone; and the final part of the triptych to the representation of multiple 'spaces' simultaneously. It's all gripping stuff to be sure.

The last three tracks on the album comprise 'Masques et parades', a salute to the circus! Now I always hated circuses. I personally find clowns to be rather evil, and I never could quite understand the reason for wanting to keep elephants in chains. Roy however sees in the circus a 'marvelous metaphor to bring together irrationality and drama, jubilation and self-control.' The first of the three parts is upbeat, but I would be hard-pushed to call it brotherly, as does Roy. This jumps abruptly to the second, which amusingly is described as 'grotesque and irrational', though I find it no more so than anything else here. The last section sees in the trapeze a complex psychological metaphor. And I thought they were just balancing on a wire.

Overall it's an album seemingly quite indicative of some major tendencies in much electroacoustic music: namely the need to read elaborate, almost philosophical schemes into the simplest of digital musings. Also, I can't help but thinking that the apparent preoccupation with psychological metaphors is typical of certain elements in French-speaking culture. Ever since Lacan went and spoilt Freud's good intentions they just can't get enough of the stuff. Both of these frightening aspects seem to converge in the skies over Montrèal, forming a sort of nebulous vortex, which threatens to engulf all sound produced there within its foul reach.

AARON ROBERTSON
4580 Avenue de Lorimier, Montréal, Québec H2H 2B5, Canada
info@electrocd.com
www.electrocd.com

Alvin Curran / Domenico Sciajni
Our Ur
ITALY ROSSBIN RECORDS RS015 CD (2004)

Alvin Curran has previously fallen into 'lesser-spotted' in my category list of avant musicians, but recently he turned up at London to play as part of the [reformed, but did they ever go away?] MEV in a reunion concert with AMM. Samples were played live on stage. Soon thereafter he sent this magazine a copy of his solo CD *Lost Marbles*, on John Zorn's label (see Art Gallery section). Further pleasant surprise to get this Rossbin release, where he partners up with Domenico Sciajno, who first showed up here on an Erstwhile release with Guiseppe Ielasi and has presumably been going from strength to strength ever since (I refer to the selections he makes in coffee bars, rather than his musical progress). MEV, a loose affiliation of composers who shared an interest in improvised noise, have roots traceable back to 1960s and share fertile, influential ideas about music performance; they knocked spots off most free-form contemporaries due to their loud and robust approach to handling large-scale noise workouts, and their intellectual rigour in solving the difficulties presented by the so-called 'freedoms' of free music.

Curran has retained the investigative and curious mind that is the provenance of all gifted and intelligent people, and has since come to grips with the 'new' technology to extent that he's now a sample-happy digitised music maker, the musical equivalent of a 'silver surfer' and one fit to match wits with any laptop-Louie. In fact, he continues to wipe floor with opposition. You've only to listen to the strong opening track, 'Someone to watch over what' – a Curran solo composition – to realise how much better this is than majority of contemporary electronica-sampling music, which in comparison comes across as mere silly footling about. It's a dense, startling composition, with ingenuity of structure and shrewdness of intent. Meaning is packed into every second; there's clear, intellectual progression of the ideas, like a well-written essay with well-presented argument. And it's exciting and impassioned, with a (warped) sense of humour undercutting everything, particularly in the semi-zany use of voices. This track alone is among my favourite pieces of music this ish.

Remainder of CD is nothing quite as strong as that opener, with possible exception of final track. On 'Outer Cities' we see first evidence of collaboration between Curran and Domenico S; this takes a regular acoustic piano improvisation played by Alvin, of which samples are treated by the Italian and re-composed, after thorough processing action has rendered sounds so that the piano appears to be strange and distant. Subsequent actions build the piece nicely into an ominous, throbbing horror…a submerged piece of brooding, soundtrack to the thoughts of a murderer. Such darkness of course is scarcely attributable to the genial Curran, but perhaps it's evidence of the musical fictions it is possible to weave using contemporary software and a powerful imagination. Wish one could say the same about CD cover, which is evidence of the artistic mayhem it's possible to weave using Photoshop. Illegible it be; horrible colour combinations; no sense of design; repellent in every possible way.

Well, back to the music…'Anatola Centrale' is Sciajno's solo turn here. He feeds his marble collection into a big drum and turns his Marshall amp up loud. Thereafter further unidentifiable objects are thrown into drum, fire is lit underneath and acid poured in to melt everything into a lively, bubbling cauldron of chaotic crashing and smashing together. As wildness goes it's not half bad, but if you proceed to next and final cut 'Rue de la Gare 76', you'll hear something even wilder. This track resulted mainly from the extensive archive of samples which Curran carries around with him (most likely inside his hatband), and his – erm - unique approach to playing the keyboard, which was probably used to trigger the samples. There's tons of overlapping voices – many of which are speaking French – mashed up with music edits and radio swipes and found sounds in powerful, unstoppable mix, not far away from territory such as Stockhausen's *Hymnen* (though much shorter). The vast array of overlapping pieces are handled in masterful manner, hugely effective and enjoyable; Sciajno is no doubt an apt collaborator here, but one suspects he did little more than stand back and gasp in admiration. I know I did. Although in sleevenotes Curran is, like the best of the Americans, not shy about declaring his 'greatness', on this occasion the music he makes backs him up completely.

ED PINSENT 25/09/2004
www.rossbin.com

Edward Ruchalski
Moveable Sites
NORWAY HUMBUG 011 CD (2002)
Edward Ruchalski
Having it Out
NORWAY HUMBUG 020 PROMO CDR [2004]

Here's another name that's new to me; a pleasure to play an unknown CD and hear such an achievement. Few musical statements display such a level of assurance and imagination. *Moveable Sites* is a strong mixture of unusual sounds, field recordings and treated voices, with a very Surrealist undercurrent throughout; to me this CD is the aural equivalent of a painting by Di Chirico.

The voices aren't the first thing you notice – in fact they seep in slowly, in true Magritte-styled dreamlike fashion. But this is one element over which creator Ruchalksi has taken particular care; they have been chosen for maximal effect, some of them half-telling strange stories which can be half-understood in the vague swirling miasma. One voice, that of poet Michael Burkhard, has been recorded with consummate craft, so that his short poem erupts into the sequence with remarkable impact.

Field recordings likewise convey a sense of drama and moment, the tapes starting at exciting moments instead of 'drifting in', as usually happens; and they aren't the usual selections such as wind and running water. Other evocative sources include home-made instruments, musical boxes, and old 78 records crackling. Fans of Philip Jeck should check in here immediately.

Although mostly an assemblage/collaged work, there is at least one piece – 'Moss Lake' –

which is a performance. It's a collaboration with another musician, and works as a centrepiece to the entire recording; which does appear to have some sort of programmed shape and reason to it that requires listening start to finish, in correct order. *Moveable Sites* lives up to its title, if heard in single sitting; suggesting the fluid mobility of the dreamer, moving and floating from one fantastic site to another with fantastic ease. Few records convey this oneiric quality which I treasure so highly.

Having It Out is another superb, uncanny, deeply moving musical work; excellent in every possible way. Ruchalski works here with unexpected and gentle collisions of form, ideas and timbre, resulting from his inspired combinations of performed music and prepared tape works. Compared with *Moveable Sites*, this one comprises more musical performance than electro-acoustic; there are none of the lurking, dreamlike voices of the former here. There are lots of slowly-rotating turntables, rich and syrupy drones, home-made percussion objects, and bowed instruments. Detuned music pours forth, at times sounding very strange, always gorgeous; provides that sense of a rare beauty, like sighting an endangered species of butterfly or bird in the forest.

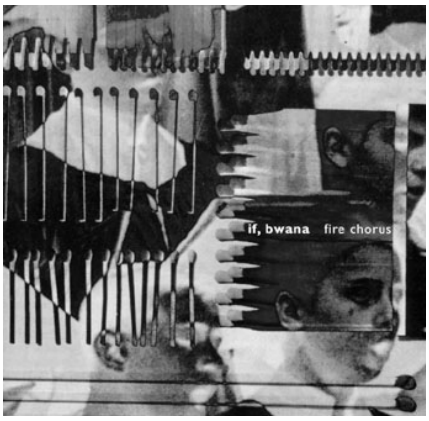
Ruchalksi's particular strength is the avoidance of cliché; it's not just another 'drone' record, and there is ample evidence of his intelligence and imagination in these compositions. For example the concision and economy, the sense that a lot of time-wasting or 'filler' material has simply been cut out and left on the editing floor. We're left with a pared-down, concentrated set of statements, and the entire work has great purpose, and deliberation. A gloriously deep and resonant artistic work. Performed with the help of Matt Broad, who adds singing voice, plays the zither and percussion, this record will help put you in touch with buried, nostalgic emotions; mixed feelings, areas of the brain and soul which normally lie dormant. Some form of time-travel may even be possible, delving into the mysteries of life and the supernatural zones.

My copy of *Having It Out* is a promo CD-R, allowing me to hear this record at least; more desirable would be to own a copy of the actual lathe-cut LP, which is how it was originally issued, in a run of only 50 copies. If you are frustrated in efforts to locate said artifact, why not contact HUMBUG and

suggest that a second edition be pressed immediately.

ED PINSENT 27/09/2004 + 16/11/2004
www.tibprod.com/humbug.htm

Edward Ruchalski is interviewed this issue.



If, Bwana
Fire Chorus
ITALY ANTS AG09 CD (2004)

Al Margolis and friends, not heard since the excellent 2 x CD set *I, Angelica* which was quite a 'whirling' fest of strangely enjoyable turgid whirlpool-syled music as I recall. Al's the man behind numerous challenging releases on his own Pogus Productions label and has an experimental lineage that begins in the 1980s glory-days of tape trading. Now he warrants a solo release on this Italian label which is devoted to releasing the finest in marginal new music and modernist composition.

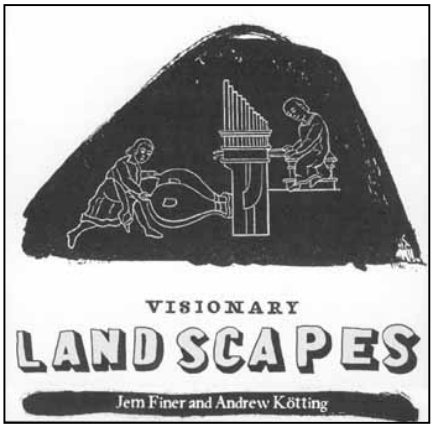
Here are four new tape compositions completed by Margolis in 2003. 'Chimes' appears to be little more than a high-pitched steady electronic pulse. It's not. It's made out of looped tapes of wind chimes, played as eight concurrent tracks for 13 minutes. Tom Johnson in miniature. The pleasing and minimalist effect is enhanced with the voice of Thomas Buckner, also appearing as samples rather than in the flesh. Buckner has a classically-intoning voice which (on his solo CDs) is an acquired taste, but here his interjections are good - like the ghost of a mariner singing snatches of sea-shanties in an oceanic heaven.

'Fire Chorus' is so significant that it has inspired the clever front cover collage, which superimposes photographs of matches and matchbooks over visages with open mouths, resulting in strange overlaps and colour negative spaces…from an earlier (1992) work, Margolis salvaged chorus-voice sections performed by his many and various friends. Then he found himself seated at the editing suite, locked into a cycle of processing this new composition over and over, until he was on the verge of tears. Whatever he tried never seemed to work. Some ten years later, he managed to resolve the dilemma successfully, and it's now become a hydra of hissing and gasping voices, along with varispeed garbles and rattlings. An internal rhythm persists, as it picks up layers and expands into stereo-panned effects. Quite sinister in tone in its subtle way; 'a kind of imploded soundtrack for a complicated and distorted world,' say Ants press department, who even manage to discern a Bosch-like vision in this work.

Further weird-formed voices are part of 'Day 8: McKenna's Brain', a complicated and disturbing melange of distorted, hollowed-out voices, mechanical groanings, and distant echoes; suggestive of a multi-screen projected cinema work, occurring across five floors of a downtown art gallery. Again, the subtle internal rhythms maintain listener's interest in this compelling piece. Somewhere in here, a guitar and an ARP synth are being played, and the voices of Adam Bohman and Adam Klein are muttering darkly. Using SoundForge technology, this 1996 piece was stretched, pasted, and mutated to produce this 'collage with a theatrical aspect'.

'Accidentally Angelica' is a 2003 reworking of the main elements of 'I, Angelica', which was originally a turgid droner using ARP synth and a steel cello. This version is more of a straight document of a performance than a tapework, using certain elements from the original, and played by an improvising ensemble. It starts as a forlorn and lonely drone, soon joined by additional layers which add considerable drama and dark colours. This CD should replay continual listening over the years as you explore its corners, its well-constructed pathways to unknown destinations, and oneiric landscapes you can lose yourself in.

ED PINSENT 10/10/2004
Via Filippo de Grenet 26, 00128 Roma, Italia
ants.rec@silenzio-distribuzione.it
www.silenzio-distribuzione.it/ants.htm



Jem Finer and Andrew Kötting
Visionary Landscapes
UNITED KINGDOM EL RINO 002 CD (2003)

Here's a beautiful record, a unique one-off, and one that manages to say something new and interesting about English folk music to boot. When commissioned to provide a soundtrack for a special film presentation about folk music at Cecil Sharp House, Jem Finer and Andrew Kötting produced this tape collage work using music and samples. The Folk Film Landscape event took place 23 May 2003, and included I think the presentation of a film called *Gallivant*, which included Super 8mm film extracts documenting folk singers and ordinary folk who knew something about the subject. *Visionary Landscapes* used soundtracks from some of these Super 8mm films and looped them into the finished work.

Over seven segments, we hear a montage that purports to be 'the unwritten and elusive histories of Folk and its reflections'. There are voices of people speaking, from a now-nearly vanished age; there are chants, rhymes, and folk songs. Everything is set against sympathetic musical compositions, including a drone from home-made valve driven electronic organ, grand pianos, and acoustic guitars. The droning is a kind of mock-Celtic / Northumbrian pipes drone, but thankfully not overly 'tasteful'; all the music is appropriate.

This is an impressionistic work, certainly, rather than something more 'scholarly'; but I maintain that it stays true to the 'spirit' of English folk music somehow. Certain areas, such as ballads, supernatural songs, murder songs and general 'weird' folk are not touched on, in favour of a 'voice of the people' approach. Spoken phrases, including one about the meaning of folk song and their contents being 'like a book', are repeated to bring home the meaning. This is a kind of update on the *Radio Ballads* series of records prepared by A L Lloyd. A dream perhaps of the golden age of vanished folk song.

The 'John Barley Corn' section is one of the most effective, and shows how the duo are able to use modern technology very effectively so that you don't even notice the sampling and layering that's going on; they bring a soul to the machinery. An old recording of the song is played against a guitar and banjo cut-up, and made doubly effective because they're in two slightly different time signatures. The addition of a birdsong recording to this one is the touch of genius that lifts it into the sublime. Moby, this is how it should be done!

A very moving record and a delightful listening experience. The warm applause at the end of the playback is heartfelt; you'll be joining them, I guarantee.

ED PINSENT 20/11/2004
http://elrino.co.uk/JemFiner/JemFiner.html

Mixed Band Philanthropist
The Man who mistook a real woman for his muse and acted accordingly
UNITED KINGDOM HYPNAGOGIA OGI01 VINYL SINGLE (2003)

A short slice of black humour – the risus sardonicus made into sound! In this perplexing cut-up mess, MBP vomits out tiny fragments of half-digested culture that have been lodged

in his gut for weeks - samples from songs, records, TV shows, mixed up with sound effects and noise, and much larded with bursts of hysterical laughter. Said laughter is probably that of the mischievous creator, poking out his tongue at the world and all that's in it. The A side has a lot of 'hilarious' willy jokes; funny how, despite the death of Benny Hill, this kind of thing lives on…the B side is pretty much more of the same, with snatches of crackly old 45s, pop shows from the 1960s, brass bands, more kitsch than there is in a pound of Jelly babies. Not a single sampled fragment lasts for longer than 1 or 2 seconds; it much take months of hard labour to edit this kind of thing. In style, it's somewhere between the Bladder Flask LP (another Richard Rupenus project), and recent cut-up antics of People Like Us, Wobbly, anomali, Broken Penis Orchestra, et al. Although it may appear to be a jolly court jester's prank, in fact this record is shrouded in darkness; it probably has no meaning whatsoever and exists mainly to remind us that the whole of life is absurd, futile and laughably pointless. Is it any wonder that my joke's an iron?

ED PINSENT 06/11/2004
www.hypnagogia.org.uk

Tibetan Red
Tibetan Red
ZANFONIA K100022 CD [ND]

An unusual 'archive' release for a change, this CD presents some mid-1980s sonic noise experiments from this mystery solo turn, and of no small interest they be. Two tracks, 'Scanning' and 'Kalahari Fire Birth', were originally unleashed on the ears of the world in cassette format in 1986, from Canadian label Freedom In A Vacuum. As more of the 1980s cassette tape-trading arena is subjected to process of rediscovery, we need only sit back and wait for the world and his brother to scour the Robin James *Cassette Mythos* book for further areas to plunder.

If we can believe the curt sleeve note, the music herein is something to do with Shamanism. The first cut appears to be an endless garland of shimmering and shrill tape loops, suggestive of 10th-generation copies and decaying oxide…it's guaranteed to send you climbing the walls and induce nine types of lunacy. This infuriating, airless, abstract, formless fog-noise gradually gets more intense and unbearable, and reduces men and women to tears…I love it! The second cut proposes a slightly fuller sound than the ghostliness of predecessor, but it's no less shapeless. Think of when you light the pilot flame under your gas boiler, but on a cosmic, planetary scale. It's roughly equivalent to 20 metric tonnes of chocolate-covered gravel to pebble-dash your brain. After some time, this 'Kalahari Fire Birth' introduces whooping voices and clapping; these are likely to be ethnological recordings of scary tribesmen performing war dance of other ceremony of shamanic frenzy. Very Psychic TV, I must say; early droners put great store in this sort of thing, presumably implying that Western civilisation is merely a veneer to conceal our 'true' selves.

The final cut on this CD is the otherwise unissued 'The Sistine Chapel'. It attempts, using sound alone, to recreate every colour and plaster-coated nuance of shade and light in this gigantic Renaissance fresco. Actually, it's from 1987 and comprises the droning of many a didjeridoo along with electronic processed noise and menacing clicking effects. It's filled with weird voices, muttering crowds, in tape-loops of mystery, repeating fragments of unknown speech. All the tracks here are 'nasty' drones, designed to cast bad magic against enemies, or induce horrible trance states in which anything could happen…a fairly malevolent intent lurks behind this noise. Use therefore with great care if ye value thy sanity.

ED PINSENT 11/10/2004

Petri Kuljuntausta
Momentum
FINLAND AUREOBEL / CHARM OF SOUND 3AB-0103 CD (2003)

Seven compositions realised between 1996 and 2002 from the portfolio of Finnish modernist Kuljuntausta, all of which are rewarding listens and some of which are in fact quite sublime. A resolute modernist, yet he has a firm grasp of tradition: awareness of musique concrète, improvisation and working with media artists has helped shape his work. Impressively for music of such resonance and depth, it's all constructed from digital samples. What he samples is, almost exclusively, live performances of music by real musicians; but he zeroes in on very small and short fragments of performance, micro-seconds of music. He believes that a performed sound has many 'hidden characteristics', things that not even the musician is aware of, and things that we listeners easily miss as each sound flies past us in real time. Once captured in his sampler, he calls them 'frozen sounds', and likes their 'dreamy, slow and timeless character'. He stretches, slows down, and transposes each sound, to the degree that he believes he can see their micro-structure passing visibly before him.

Through his process then, he hopes to reveal these hidden depths, and re-express them in deep, vibrant, exciting new contexts. His method is very far apart from that of the restless and cramped blip-blip, digital glitch and mosaic method favoured by so many editors these days; he thinks big, in terms of Vista-Vision, filling large canvasses. About half of the compositions are practically orchestral in scope, grand cathedral-filling and ceiling-rattling epics, with strings, choirs and gorgeous spectral drones. The other principal mode he works in is no less intriguing, one which involves continual-repetitions of short or clipped phrases arranged in near-serial compositions. Of the two, I tend to prefer the former more wide-screen 'romantic' mode; apparently he's executed another recent work based on the sounds of the Aurora Borealis.

The composer admits he is aware of the effect he's creating – near-impossible music. It could not be played by human beings, but creates the real and strong impression that it could be, or is. He does not reject this possibility, which he likes for its 'surrealist' dimension. Certainly you get a piece like 'Violin Tone Orchestra', with its eerily fascinating and dissonant repeated tones, and realise that not even the most iron-willed disciplined violinist could manage such precision and constant repetition. Another important component is the spiritual dimension, but this is neither confirmed nor denied by Kuljuntausta. The first composition 'Canvas' strikes me as modern music for the Catholic mass; that's how rich it is, filed with religious awe and incense-wreathed ornament. Other titles 'In the Beginning' and 'When I am laid in earth' might be further hints in that direction; the latter suggests a burial mass. All these are deeply moving works.

Although there's a slight wrong turning at the beginning of 'Freedom' (it starts off like some pompous anthem in sludgy Ambient-mode), this CD is otherwise an unqualified triumph. Kuljuntausta could be the Finnish John Wall; he takes as much care in selection and assemblage of his sources. As opposed to Wall's austere and minimalist path, this composer has chosen the path of maximal and rich sounds. Another surprise from the Nordic realms…I'm delighted and enraptured.

ED PINSENT 07/10/2004
PO Box 353, Fin-00131, Helsinki, Finland
petriear@nic.fi

IN THE ART GALLERY

■■■■■AND MODERN COMPOSERS■■■■■

Various Artists
Haunted Weather: Music, Silence and Memory
GERMANY STAUBGOLD 52 2 x CD (2004)

Only a single 'spin' and I'm already impressed enough by this dazzling compilation to dub it a resounding success. Considering some of my reservations regarding Mr David Toop and his angle on music, this is something of an achievement. To begin with, it's nothing to do with 'weather'. It's not, for example, a collection of atmospheric field recordings or documents of thunderstorms (even though Chris Watson, who has made such recordings, does appear here). Rather, it's Toop's way of getting a handle on certain diverse strands in contemporary music-making, surveying what's been taking place over the last (say) 7 or 8 years; comparing it with similar instances from the past; and pulling everything together in such ways that suddenly everything makes 'sense'.

Do you really need a list of names of everyone included here? Here's work by lots of musicians, whose work I thought I already 'knew', yet this comp provides a fresh perspective and establishes many valid and significant connections between things never noticed before. In like manner, a spreadsheet on a computer can 'sum across' lots of known numerical data and generate sets of new numbers that illuminate the data and bring it into three dimensions. A spreadsheet or database of course can merely produce flat statistical data; Toop has instead used intuition, artistic insights, wild suppositions. (Above all, he has used his ears.) He reinterprets musical history in a subjective manner, and the results are truly refreshing.

Music presented herein results from wide selective trawl: electronica, improvisation, 'quiet' or reduced music, 'Onkyo' music from Japan, field recordings, minimalist composers and performers, turntablists. Most are names of artists well-established, renowned or notorious; a quick count of the sample reveals that it is mostly taken from Europe and Japan. There are 15 names from the United Kingdom, 13 from Japan, 7 from mainland Europe and only four from the USA (although there a few I don't know). Even narrower: most of the Englishmen are London Musician's Collective veterans, most of the Japanese from the Bar Aoyama or Off Site scene. Small world.

As an amazing listening experience, this set is matchless. The selections are seamlessly edited together into two continuous 'suites' across two wide-canvas panoramic discs. Index points are burned in, sure, but the music/sound flow is completely continuous. You cannot tell the gaps; it's a contiguous, ever-changing atmospheric influx, closely-woven from 18 and then 15 tracks, all of which were originally separated by circumstances of time, space, nationality, medium, intent…and now? All of this says more about Toop than the music, in a way. He's thought long and hard about what portions of music to choose, and even harder about where to put it in his grand design. In the same way that the Harry Smith-compiled *Anthology of American Folk Music* worked, this works. Greil Marcus (analysing the Smith compilation) pointed out how it brought things together, the way that the mind of polymath Smith discerned patterns in the whole crazy-quilt of American folk-blues and, through his sequencing, called attention to the echoes, resonances and correspondences between them. Now Toop performs similar service for the more experimental realms.

His primary motivation for this project seems to have been fuelled by a response he had to a small concert in Japan. Exact circumstances of this anecdote are related in his notes; it resulted in a lot of deep-rooted assumptions being challenged. He couldn't tell where the music was coming from; there was a fear that computers were taking over sound and music manipulation, a fear that real instruments were becoming redundant. At point of crisis, it turned into an epiphany: the realisation that there might be some unseen 'circuitry'

connecting humans, places and listeners, something that makes everything work, something that establishes new connections in spite of all this apparent disconnectedness. This connective circuitry might be a recent development; it may only now be evolving. *Haunted Weather* became, over the course of years, a personal mission for Toop to locate evidence that might support his theory.

The chosen title as described by Toop is simply a 'metaphor…for uncertainty, excitement, and profound change.' At the same time, he was interested in human memory, and how music is dependent on memory (both listener and musician) to make it work; and in silence, the use of silence in music. Ghosts, vibrations, echoes…I'm starting to sound like him now…whichever way you cut it, this CD set is an excellent illustrated personal essay on aspects of modern music, with supporting examples; much like his previous *Ocean Of Sound* project. In fact there is a companion tome for this record also. I'm almost tempted now to order a copy…

ED PINSENT 14/10/2004

Alvin Curran

Lost Marbles

USA TZADIK TX 7097 CD (2004)

As you know, MEV was founded in 1966 by three American composers who were living in Rome at the time. Their dedication to free noise is symbolised, to me, by their judicious use of the empty olive oil can as a musical instrument; who knows, if they'd been in Beijing at the time, it might have been an empty can of monosodium glutamate, and the history of modern music would have taken a quite different turn.

Alvin Curran was one of the MEV guys. This release, along with the Rossbin CD this issue, will allow you to discover what he's like as a composer when he's not engaged in the act of improvising and may confirm for you, as label hopes, his position as 'a courageous and outrageous musical maverick'. He realises his works with the help of The California Vocal Academy, The Orchestra of the Sudwestfunk Radio Stuttgart, The Paul Dresher Ensemble, and a little combo of free musicians he calls The Alvin Curran Filharmonia. The latter features international stars: Shelley Hirsch, Fred Frith, Domenico Sciajno and William Winant.

Lost Marbles is enormously varied. On the orchestral pieces, which include 'In Hora Mortis' and 'Pittura Fresca', it seems as though there's no musical idiom at which Curran won't have a tilt. He veers close to jazz big-band arrangements like Duke Ellington, film score music with the assurance of a Morricone, serial music not far from Philip Glass; he even seems to dip a toe into certain European genres, perhaps Webern or 12-tone music, though I'm no musicologist. The point is that Curran is sincere; he does not do this with the sneering sarcasm of Frank Zappa, whose musical quotations were often one step away from cruel parody. That's even when Curran's music could be mistaken for a later-period Zappa composition at 20 paces. I wonder how classical music acquires this distinctly American accent?

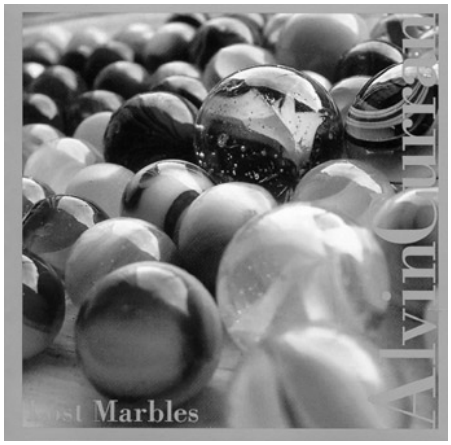
On 'Inner Cities 2', we have a sumptuous and ambiguous piano piece, played by the composer, and not far from the work of the great Morton Feldman, perhaps mixed with the tiniest dash of Gershwin. Another intriguing blend of styles and genres.

His works for the sampler include 'Toto Angelica', 'Endangered Species', 'Romulus and Remus make a Ruckus', and 'For MG' to a certain extent. The latter is really more of a tape-work to be quite accurate; it shows a lively and imaginative use of good urban field recordings, blended with piano pieces which weave all the sounds into a kind of ambiguous story structure. The 'Romulus' piece is another recent work arising from his collaborations in Italy with Deomnico Sciajno, and uses the same library of mad, disjunctive samples. 'Toto Angelica' is a stunner, opening the disc and waking up the unwary listener with its near-shocking juxtapositions; in less than 90 seconds it completely wipes the floor with most sample-based records, scoring high marks for sheer élan and contrast.

We mustn't forget the witty John Cage tribute piece. It uses samples of Cage's chortling, mixed with samples of Merce Cunningham's cat purring.

This leaves us with a few oddities to assimilate. The piece 'Maritime Rites – Wasserkorso' is played by ship's horns, 11 of them, computer-controlled, and is a grand and mournful blast. A recent collection from New World Recordings will, I suspect, be an entire record played in like manner. 'Music is Not Music' uses the Vocal Academy with a chamber ensemble of brass, piano and percussion, to sing a modernist slow elegy using sumptuous chords and harmonies, apparently ruminating on the death of music…it drives a final nail in the coffin, for sure. The second cut in the CD's sequence, and it's absolutely beautiful; stately and slow, yet a splendid attention-getter.

Then there's 'Return To Sender', using the small and informal Filharmonia group of free players. This one comes closest to sounding like an improvisation record, an impression created largely by the formless twittering voice of Shelley Hirsch. The live electronics add a good gritty dimension to it; the playing



of all musicians, in fact, is excellent, but the cello work of Joan Jeanrenard is spectacular. A revelation to me…

These compositions from 1987-2003 have been recorded to a high degree of excellence, matched with topnotch pressing quality which one associates with this John Zorn label. Although the music might appear a little bit wacky on occasion, this may be deliberate; Curran isn't a stern, fun-denying chap. *Lost Marbles* may denote two things – one, that he's lost his mind, and two that the music is like a kid's game…because it can be quite playful at times. It is always entertaining and far from solemn. Only Americans can do this any conviction; I mean compose something in this way in the first place, and then perform it with any conviction.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2004

61 Fourth Avenue, pmb 126, New York, NY 10003, USA

CM Von Hausswolff

Three overpopulated Cities built by short-sighted planners. An unbalanced and quite dangerous airport and an abandoned church

BELGIUM SUB ROSA SR217 CD (2004)

The Swedish 'high priest' of conceptual-minimalism strikes back, putting many lesser men in their place, with his second CD for this label (the first was *Rays Of Beauty*) and part of a projected 'trilogy'. Here's another baffling disc of mysteriously-sourced recordings by this high-minded, cerebral and severe svengali of sound, placing himself back in the arena with no quarter given nor asked, and no apparent climbdown from his lofty position since last interviewed by TSP in issue 10.

I take this release to be a sharp critique of modern society's architecture, and hence an attack on society itself…CM has frequently exhibited a preoccupation with space, urban space in particular. Making sound out of it, capturing tapes in it, and replaying sounds (sometimes the same sounds) in the same urban space. Here, he seems to turn that space against us in some way, revealing to us

miserable urban-dwellers what a trap we all live in, a trap carefully laid over time, courtesy of modern civic design. Much of that highly critical stance is right there in the title of this CD, where already CM is coming out with the gloves off…but the sound art hereon is no less harsh, remorseless or unforgiving. Sheesh, no wonder this guy doesn't get invited to more parties!

'Mexico City and Tokyo' are presumably two of the overpopulated cities, the first overdeveloped hell-holes to face 'the treatment'. CMvH sees them as little more than vast expanses of concrete, desolate stretches relieved only by electric lights. He portrays the two cities using a heavy, resonating hum against which he pitches crackles, whistles, and sardonic whines. Extreme minimalism conveys utterly bleak, Ballardian view of these urban mega-communities. Grim vista dissipates, in a blast of cold winds from the East.

'Muhammada Murtala or so…' – one heck of a typical cryptic title – could refer to airport which he holds in his hate. In his world, said airport is already in ruins, the fluttering static noise suggesting the sad flipping-over of utterly redundant electronic departure boards. 'Bangkok' could be his third targeted city, here represented by yet another heavy humming. The density of the population is reaching critical mass here. Short-wave attacks descend, like a flurry of unwanted and unnecessary information. Curious how so much minimalism can suggest a feeling of 'overload'. 'Leftover Gods in Chicago' must refer to the abandoned church. More of Carl-Michael's minimal humming, now set forth to lay waster to over 100 years of bad planning mistakes. He will vibrate all the concrete into dust and leave not a wrack behind.

This is an intense recording…it sees Carl-Michael engaging with the world once again; his previous releases have been like retreats into mysticism, compared with this. That said, his clear-headed 'materialist' approach this time leads him to deny any spiritual dimension; at least one previous record was themed along lines of 'spirit communication', but now (based on evidence of last track) he's predicting the death of God. Likewise, he seems to efface all humanity from the earth in his vision; his sonic death rays vaporise the populace, leaving vacant cities much like the washed-out photos of deserted sites on the sleeve. How utterly pessimistic…easy to put the blame on modern developers, Carl, but where is your solution? Answer: it lies in imagination and vision, two qualities he certainly does not deny.

ED PINSENT 12/10/2004

Michael J Schumacher
Stories
GERMANY QUECKSILBER 8 CD (2004)

After *Room Pieces* comes…*Stories*, layers in a building. American composer Schumacher gathers tiny micro-second samples of real-time playing of traditional instruments, pops his bundles of edits into the combine harvester of his computer, and lets random programs cast them forth into complex mosaics of sparkling, finely-honed arrays. Actually, rather than a casting, it's more like a

gradual release of near-invisible gaseous clouds. These incredibly quiet works require listener to pay 100% attention, or risk missing the important details. 'Still (2004)' is an update on 'Still (2002)' which surfaced on his last double-CD set on Phill Niblock's XI Records label. Among the sampled instruments in the library are cello, violin, bass clarinet, trombone, voices…there's also the guitar of Donald Miller, an old sparring partner of MJS on the great Flood CD they made together. Tim Barnes is the hyper-active polymath percussionist who's always involved with dozens of projects, and he's on here too – plus he did the mastering at his own Quakebasket editing facility.

Several listens are mandatory before you can even discern the musical samples in the ultra-subtle 'Still (2004)'. The library of sampled instruments are more clearly audible on 'Two Three and Four Part Inventions', where the micro-edit process also becomes more evident. Almost disjointed fragments of the jigsaw puzzle seep out of the computer's memory banks in strange, unpredictable sequences and combinations, to exciting effect. Although at first this work may resemble a scored piece of 20th century music by Luigi Nono or Boulez, you soon realise it would be a tough task for any orchestra to replicate this complicated sequence of drones, rattles, creaks, zips, plucks, garbles and moans. It also begs the question about who's doing the composing, and the playing; although such vexed questions are beyond a dunce like me, and certainly this issue doesn't figure in the composer's scheme of things. He's too busy working.

'Room Pieces New York' is the latest manifestation of *Room Piece*, an ongoing project that's open-ended enough to allow him to efficiently recycle the basic idea, and the library of samples he's built up, in new contexts and new locations. This particular version came from an art installation, with additional live elements, in an NYC gallery February 2004. *Room Piece* is normally done as a sound environment with complex multi-speaker setups, and a computer feeding streams of data through several channels. This version adds voices; the voice of a woman vaguely singing little phrases to herself among the eerie, moaning and shimmering musical sounds. Her presence adds intimacy to this otherwise stately work.

'Pulse' is the longest thing on the disc at around 32:00; it's mostly a midi piano with more gently murmuring voices in fascinating, overlapped layers, over a very subtle rattling and pulsing effect. To hear a piano in the context of his otherwise stark and minimal approach is extremely lush and romantic. Jocelyn Robert, the French-Canadian electroacoustic muso, assisted with the midi sound; but who played piano? A profoundly moving statement this one, with quite strange after-effects; recommended if you like Morton Feldman. I have a lot of time for Schumacher…let's face it, you *need* a lot of time!

ED PINSENT 10/10/2004
www.quecksilber-music-com

Tod Dockstader
Eight Electronic Pieces
USA LOCUST MUSIC L36 CD (2003)

Our Art Gallery section must be set to blow out judging by the number of CD reissues of works recorded in the last 50 plus years by various musicians, artists and others who, along with their art, had hitherto flown under most people's radar screens. Most such reissues will be of interest only if you have prior knowledge of the kinds of experimental / avant-garde music made in those days, plus the intellectual sophistication (often necessitating formal academic studies - and maybe I should have put inverted commas around 'intellectual sophistication' previously?) and a king-sized bum to sit through it all. Fortunately with *Eight Electronic Pieces* you don't need such specialised attributes. The music, being at once electronic music / tape music / musique concrète, fits no category and thus no ideology or philosophy of music, and so needs no formal explanation to underpin it or bolster its attractions, if there be such. But I can happily report there are such; I gather you already know that with much formal experimental / avant-garde music, an inverse relationship may exist between the amount of formal gobbledygook needed to legitimise a

piece of music as worthy and the actual quality of the piece. And at 36 minutes, the entire recording can be sat through and savoured in one sitting, which is the ideal way to appreciate it, despite it being eight mini-blocs of sound art.

Notwithstanding its age (it was done in 1960), the piece does not seem all that dated, such are the cleanness and sharp definition of the recording. The sounds are self-referential, with very few bits recognisable as, say, aeroplane noises or human voices, and while this makes it difficult to identify where tracks begin and end, this means that to some extent the recording escapes its temporal context. (Although when *The Wire* tested French musician Luc Ferrari on this CD as part of its Invisible Jukebox series, he correctly identified 1960 as the year of the original recording.) Wisely, Tod Dockstader simply calls this music *Eight Electronic Pieces* with no titles for the individual pieces and no explanation of what the sounds are or what they are meant to do; the music is thus open to many interpretations which may shift over time. The sounds proceed in an orderly manner and are arranged in distinct blocs according to mood or other criterion at Dockstader's discretion; within each bloc and within the recording overall, there is a definite structure to the music with quiet passages and climaxes occurring where expected.

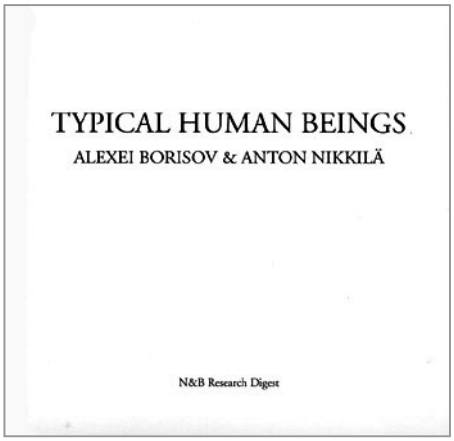
This CD serves as a handy introduction to the kinds of musical experimentation undertaken in the late 1950s / early 1960s. The music is structured in an intuitive and untutored way and allows listeners to immerse themselves in sounds and accustom themselves to the lack of traditional musical elements such as melody and rhythm before tackling more rigorous formal European and American music experiments. The recording is also a good early attempt to bring experimental music to the public in a non-elitist way. Unfortunately, Dockstader's career in experimental music did not last very long; isolation from musicians who might have helped him, his lack of 'appropriate' qualifications, the elitism of music research institutions which refused him funding for his work, the advent of synthesisers and the failure of his last and apparently not very distinguished work *Omniphony I* forced an early end to his experimentation. However, his other early works, *Quatermass* and *Apocalypse*, have been rescued from oblivion and Dockstader is now able to enjoy his rightful place as a musical pioneer in the sun.

JENNIFER HOR
www.locustmusic.com

Alexei Borisov / Anton Nikkilä

Typical Human Beings
FINLAND / RUSSIA N & B RESEARCH DIGEST NBRD-07 CD (2004)

When the sun slowly sets on a post-industrial northern hinterland ravaged by years of neglect, I'm sure it does so to an



accompanying soundtrack produced by N & B Research Digest. The digest's research is directed with all seriousness by label heads Alexei Borisov and Anton Nikkilä. With one based in Helsinki and the other in Moscow, between them they have these large, cold lands that meet at the end of the Baltic Sea wired for some very strange sounds indeed. A little surprisingly it has taken until now to bring their combined talents together on an album. Don't be deceived for one minute by the title, for these two are far from being typical human beings.

Borisov and Nikkilä seem to embody something of Walter Benjamin's idea of the 'collector', for true collectors of sound they are: scouring the ravaged wasteland for any useful fragment that they can possibly retrieve from the wreckage and debris, to use in their sonic machine designed to reveal to the remaining inhabitants of these lands the pathetic nature of their existence. They are not interested in just preserving these scraps in the state that they found them however. What these two are really concerned with is a surrealist juxtaposition of these fragments; their ultimate goal is nothing short of revolution.

The thread that ties everything neatly together on this CD is formed by Borisov's texts, which he recites with a menacing growl. In keeping with the surrealist theme they strike one as belonging to the automatic writing variety favoured by the likes of Breton. This makes a refreshing change from much music normally presented as extreme, which often seems to go out of its way to eliminate any trace of the humanity involved in its making. Not so here, and indeed one of the distinguishing factors of all the label's releases that I've had the pleasure of hearing is precisely this willingness to embrace human nature.

Everything here has the unmistakeable touch of the 'amateur'. Now before you go thinking that I demean the sterling efforts of these two, I must point out that I am talking in the original French sense of the word. It has acquired something of a negative implication in English, but in its original tongue an amateur is literally somebody who performs an activity out of love for doing so, and that is distinctly audible here. A far cry from your icy-cold professionalism, this love runs through all those texts that border on the insane, through the dirty, analogue sounds driven by decaying soviet tube technology, through the spewing digitalia that creeps around the sticky edges of these short but telling anti-songs.

Much like Benjamin himself these two manage to quote a plethora of sources: electronica; free jazz; lounge; and good old rock and roll all find themselves referenced, though not in any way that would be recognisable by aficionados of these genres. Instead, they find themselves cut-up and abused, used as staring points for further departure, filled with 'stains and acoustic disturbances' as the accompanying press nicely exclaims. Out of this disturbing brew arises a series of psychological snapshots of Borisov and Nikkilä's surroundings, past and present. 'Typical Human Beings', they confidently say, 'aims to be the sound of zoom-adjusting standard perspective into an impossible position.'

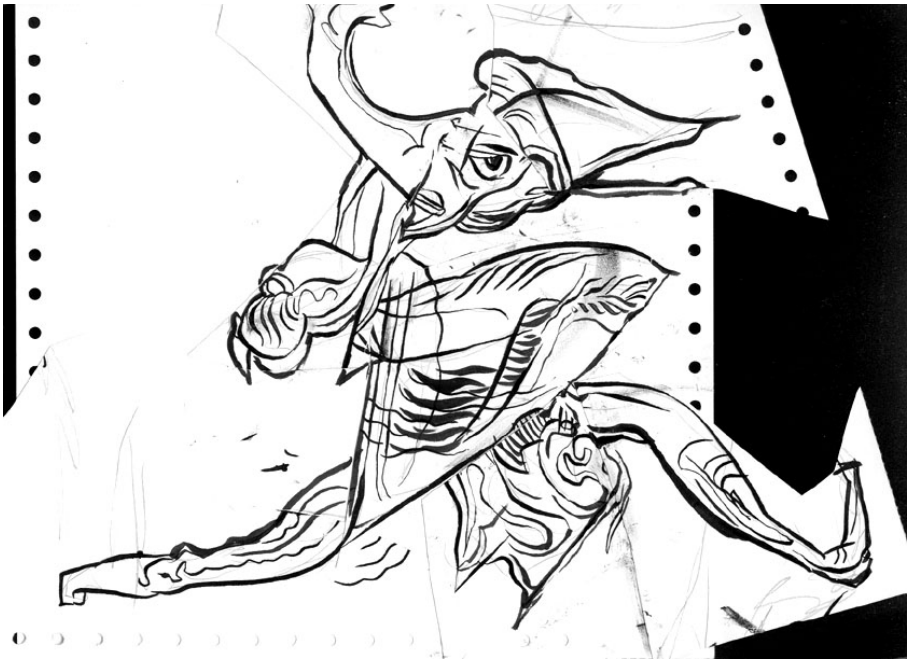
A ready equivalent to all of this is hard to find, especially in the ever-expanding field of sound. One may be possibly uncovered in the strange world created in Tarkovsky's classic, *Stalker*. This CD could well be music from the Zone, where one cannot advance in straight lines without risking certain death. From the 'Automated Management System for the Seafood Industry' to the 'Transmission Equipment of the Nightingale', Borisov and Nikkilä have constructed an album of such singularity that it is capable of extinguishing all other sound currently available to us. The only consolation we have is this: if only this album were to exist, we would all be free.

AARON ROBERTSON
Hiekkalaiturinraitti 12 A 9, 00980 Helsinki, Finland
mail@nbresearchdigest.com
www.nbresearchdigest.com

Michael Wertmüller

Die Zeit, eine Gebrauchsanweisung
GERMANY GROB 545 CD (2003)

Great record! It's completely nuts bizarre noisy modernist composition by some loopy German guy who lives in Switzerland, no doubt so mad that he's permanent resident inside a cuckoo-clock. Can't recommend it enough. Three tracks…the first one is his tour de force, a short but highly dense work whose title translates as 'Time – a user's manual'. Get out! The orchestra landed with the hideous task of realising this complex piece had to read the score off computer screens…it's filled with insane orchestral passages, all punctuated by wild percussion attacks. Wertmüller is a drummer by trade, by nature, and by choice…and he composes like one too. He believes in the value of impossible time signatures, and in constructing music *so complex* that it can't even be played! Frank Zappa, and his hero Edgard Varese, would probably approve of the high-profile percussion elements here. They were both percussion composers really – Zappa's strong understanding of rhythm underpinned most of his best work, and Varese's use of drumming in the orchestra was incredibly radical; which



makes one wish for a recording of his works where the drumming is loud and forceful, instead of the insipid paradiddling you normally get from wimpy classical performers. Apparently, Wertmüller writes a lot of his work on computers and one of his scores was so dense with information that not even a computer was capable of processing it! Anything that makes modern technology fall over has gotta be good, in anyone's book…

Needless to remark, I know nothing whatsoever about the rules of classical composition, but I love the dark intense sound of all this intellectual nonsense, and the ways in which it advances use of mad electronic music within apparently classical context, like Xenakis and Stockhausen, and pushes same into yet more perplexing realms. Plus this package (all black artworks!) comes with sleeve note setting forth pretentious, impenetrable ideas about the nature of time and fourth dimension which doesn't even permit itself to be read. What are you waiting for?

Other two 'works' on offer comprise 'Entleibung', parts one and three, which are pretty much a string quartet slugging it out with live electronics. In these tense episodes (dedicated to, among others, the noise-guitar freak Caspar Brötzmann), the strings work overtime and a half to outdo the dark electronica, either through mad fiddling actions – elbows flying about twenty to the dozen – or through ghastly, atonal droning and shrieking. Who couldn't love this? Plus overall you get a tremendous recording quality – good and loud, which is something Deutsche Grammophon could learn from! Note presence of Stephan Wittwer on guitar, and some computer programmer who has since been retired to mental home with severe twitching of eyeball syndrome. I think this Wertmüller guy has some connection to Steamboat Switzerland, the proggy-electronic loons who use Hammond organs so well. As said, he's a jazz drummer by day and is also possessed of frightening intellect, matching his deranged music against obscure and difficult texts from far-flung corners of history, literature and fine art. Man, I'd love to shake this guy's hand, but he'd probably just use his sticks to beat out a tattoo on my knuckles. Yowch!

ED PINSENT 20/09/2004
Goertz Klopotek GbR, Alte Koelner Str 10, D-40699, Erkrath
www.churchofgrob.com

Pekka Airaksinen

Madam I'm Adam
RUSSIA / FINLAND N&B RESEARCH DIGEST / LOVE RECORDS LXCD 642 2 x CD (2003)

This is the second N & B Research Digest CD I've been fortunate enough to come across (after the excellent second volume of their *Geologists and Professional Tourists* reviewed last issue), and one produced especially for Finland's legendary Love Records. Like all their releases it has an air of scholarly authority about it, possibly due to the large amount of information they seem capable of providing (pay attention down the back!), and the sparse covers that look like they're the product of some obscure educational institution. Here they have compiled a retrospective look at the little known Finnish composer / eternal beatnik, Pekka Airaksinen. It's not an exhaustive issue, but more like a 'best of' from three distinct creative periods. It is accompanied by an additional CD of remixes produced by a host of players on the modern avant scene.

The first period represented is some of Airaksinen's earliest recorded work from the late 1960s with the colourfully named The Sperm, and a solo track from 1970. The Sperm were apparently a collective of sorts, of both musicians and non-musicians, influenced heavily by the likes of The Velvet Underground and The Mothers of Invention. So far so good. Their three tracks here are certainly interesting historically, although they possibly don't live up to The Sperm's own raison d'être: that of aiming to take their sound as far beyond 'music' as possible. What we have is big, fat slabs of proto-rock feedback and distortion that hang heavily in the air, with the addition of free-jazz saxophones and disembodied voices from Helsinki's taxi call-centres. Similarly, the first solo Airaksinen track here consists largely of fractured rhythms and metallic percussion that doesn't generate a lot of forward movement, but is instead content to linger menacingly.

The next set of tracks on the album date from the mid '70s and early '80s. They see Airaksinen charting what is probably quite a familiar trajectory: leaving behind the outright hedonism of The Sperm, and moving towards Oriental philosophy, in particular Buddhism. The tracks from the early 1980s date from the period of what is considered (in a wonderful display of spin) as Airaksinen's most coherent album, 'Buddhas of Golden Light'. They sound for the most part like some late, alternate version of jazz fusion (and yes, I say that in a good way), the sort of thing that might of come about had not Zawinul and his compadres in Weather Report got their greasy hands all over it. There are more examples of highly syncopated beats, now being produced by a Roland 808, over which Airaksinen improvises keyboard lines and saxophones wail.

The last cuts here date from the present day, perhaps conveniently skipping over Airaksinen's mid '90s 'new-age' period (we all had one didn't we?), and touch on some of the outings Airaksinen has had in the last few years. He has apparently emerged in one piece from his personal quest for enlightenment, and is now very much taken with the ability to release much of his music himself on CD-R, putting things out at an enormous rate: fifteen albums apparently in 2003 alone. This late period also see Airaksinen making much use of palindromes and nonsensical wordings for his releases, hence the title of this CD, which seems particularly apt given the contradictory nature of the man.

The CD of remixes that accompanies all this does feel a little gratuitous. It probably serves as some much-deserved promotion for Airaksinen, but one feels it may have been better to include a further sampling of Airaksinen's own work rather than attempt to find a contemporary context for it. It has to be said that most of the people represented don't add anything essential with their handling of the material, and I imagine that the hermetic nature of Airaksinen's work makes it difficult to do so. Some of the few contributions of note: Nurse with Wound, possibly among the first to recognise Airaksinen's genius by including him an the famous list of influences that accompanied *Chance Meeting On A Dissecting Table Of A Sewing Machine And An Umbrella*; Mira Calix, who uses the material of 'Korvapoliklinikka Hesperia' as the background for a plaintive, impressionistic melody; and Curd Duca, who

sensibly reduces the nearly-twenty minutes of 'Dodekafoninen talvisota' down to under three.

Together, the two CDs do a good job of resuscitating interest in one of Finland's overlooked heroes of modern music, and it is possibly this historical aspect that makes it seem like a project well suited to the resources of N & B Research Digest. Now that Airaksinen has returned to the fold, older and presumably wiser though perhaps not without some scars, it will be interesting to see where his path leads. This is far from an exhaustive selection of his previous work and to get a better picture of the man it may have been necessary to include the cheese with the beef as it were. Still, one shouldn't complain. After all, reputations will always be made by somebody, and you could do a lot worse than to entrust yours to Alexei Borisov and Anton Nikkilä.

AARON ROBERTSON
Hiekkalaiturinraitti 12 A 9, 00980 Helsinki, Finland
mail@nbresearchdigest.com
www.nbresearchdigest.com

Various Artists

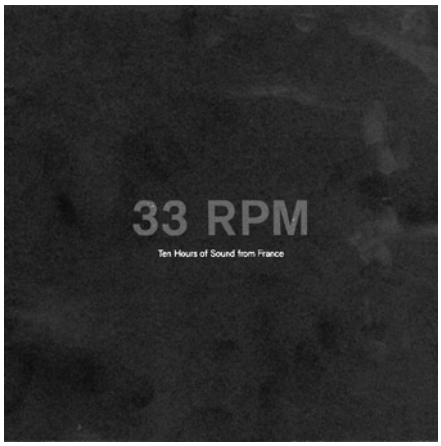
33 RPM: Ten Hours of Sound from France

U.S.A 23FIVE / SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
23F/SFM 903 CD (2003)

It always seems to be an interesting sociological exercise witnessing the uncertain process whereby particular names are inducted into the various cannons of Man's creative endeavour. Reputations can be made and broken in the devil knows how many ways, but the details of just who gets put in and who gets left out of such lists has always had the air of some perverse intrigue. Who decides what is representative of a genre, and what constitutes an example of such quality as to be worth preserving more than others? These questions threaten to hurl us into some dark, mouldy corner of academia, but I remain undaunted and so you should be too.

All this is preliminary to discussing the album at hand, produced in association with an exhibition held at the end of 2003 at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. This exhibition attempted, bravely to be sure, to underscore the extensive nature of French sound experimentation and electronic composition by presenting ten hours of material dating back to the early 1950s, and ranging to the present day. The CD of course could not hope to present such material in its entirety, and instead offers a selection from the exhibition that emphasizes an acousmatic approach toward electroacoustic composition.

The fun begins with the exhibition's somewhat taxing taxonomy. The sonic material assembled was presented in the form of ten one-hour programmes. Each of these programmes, themed to cover a different aspect of sound creation, featured between seven and twelve different pieces of music, the



entire playlist of which is reproduced in the back of the CD's booklet. In their entirety these ten programmes were designed by the exhibition's curator Laurent Daillleau to give an historical overview of the experimental sound scene existing in France from the beginning of musique concrète. To add to the confusion, each of the hourly programmes existed as part of a rotating schedule of listening during the exhibition's week long run.

Of course not even ten hours could hope to encompass the enormity of the French contribution to what we know and love as 'new music' today. Still, from the looks of the playlist there are what I would have thought to be some glaring omissions. The first of the themed sections for example, entitled 'GRM + Musique Concrète', is almost exclusively Pierre Schaeffer. While I won't be the one to downplay his pivotal role, Pierre Henry on the other hand is seemingly written out of proceedings altogether. Likewise in the 'Improvisation + Beyond' section, the only name I recognize is Jérôme Noetinger. Surely there are more than a handful of people that are more deserving of inclusion here than some of the others. Strange too is the almost complete dismissal of IRCAM, which gets a not too complimentary mention in the CD's liner notes. The list goes on.

Which then brings us to the matter of the CD, a sampling of an exhibition that is itself a greater sample. The immediately noticeable thing is that all the tracks with the exception of Lionel Marchetti's piece 'A Rebours' were produced in the last couple of years by a grand total of nine different people. So the CD is hardly representative of the exhibition, and in fact is a very contemporary document. There are selections from several of the various programmes, although frustratingly some of the tracks appear to have no corresponding presence amongst the exhibition playlist. Quite how one can justify the inclusion of material not in the exhibition as being representative of that exhibition I am not sure.

There remains the greater question of whether one should be discussing the exhibition at all given that the CD is in fact a separate aesthetic object. It's an interesting argument, but one that crumbles miserably in the face of all reasonable evidence that marks the CD as deriving its very raison d'être from the exhibition in question. As a contemporary document it is not without charm, although hardly astounding. There are small nods in various sonic directions that include musique concrète, electroacoustic music, free improv and laptop manipulation which whilst showing variety are not definitive articles in any sense. The album overall seems to suffer from a good deal of confusion as to exactly what it should be hoping to achieve. After listening I am also none the wiser.

AARON ROBERTSON
P.O. Box 460951, San Francisco, CA 94146-0951, USA
auscultare@aol.com
www.23five.org

Ellen Fullman

Staggered Stasis

USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS
NOM 29 CD (2004)

If you have 70 minutes to waste listening to a load of samey electronic drone-music pieces, then this is just the CD for you. This is contemporary 'long-form' minimalist sound art devised and executed by USA composer Fullman. It's played on a device called a long-string instrument, and she did it in an unoccupied office block in Austin, Texas, in the latter half of the 1980s. This has something to do with electronic resonators that make a noise as you walk towards them. Musically, Fullman indicates that her work is based on the focused study of overtones, and she uses mathematical methods to calculate harmonics instead of traditional composition. This overlaps favourably with the work of other USA minimalists La Monte Young, Charlemagne Palestine and Phill Niblock, with the difference being that Fullman isn't very interesting to listen to. I suppose that with the element of movement, physically walking up and down a large loft space to get from one resonator to another, you have some kind of action that shades into conceptual sculpture or gallery-based installation work…but so what? She speaks of getting 'saturated' by the sounds as she performed. Admittedly, you will too, but you'll also realise that getting saturated isn't really enough. Despite composer's aspirations (NB – she might only be concerned with pure form), there isn't really enough going on in this largely empty and boring work, neither is there any spiritual component as found in, say, music of Eliane Radigue.

ED PINSENT 22/09/2004
POB Box 22195, Seattle, WA 98122-0195, USA
www.anomalousrecords.com

Various Absurdist Speech Artists

Phrênésie#2: A space of language experimentation

FRANCE FIBRR RECORDS / VERTPITUITE NO NUMBER CD (2003)

A perplexing, irritating and pretentious record. It's something to do with 'verbal and musical language', and the work of Samuel Beckett. Since John Tilbury appears on it, and I'm a great admirer of some of Beckett's work, I thought I should check this out. Sheer folly on my part! Apart from anything else, the compilers missed an obvious Morton Feldman connection here…but I don't suppose it matters. The first part comprises cut-ups and tape manipulations of the voice of Tilbury, speaking about the ways in which he does a Beckett performance. Julien Ottavi and Sophie Gosselin (the two ginks who, I assume, perpetrated this atrocious abortion) are responsible for the tapework; I can see them falling over each other with mutual admiration at their own cleverness. Secondly, Tilbury reads three Beckett pieces, including the notorious 'Ping' which was also an inspiration for composer Roger Reynolds. The recording is flat and, though he may be a great piano player, Tilbury's readings lack drama. Billie Whitelaw he ain't. But I don't suppose that matters either. The third part comprises Brandon Labelle, repeating a single absurd phrase into a hand-held cassette recorder. He does it over and over for 24 minutes. Well, fuck that. I never want to hear this horrible record again!

ED PINSENT 08/11/2004
info@apo33.org
http://periclite.free.fr/SITEPHRENESIE/depart1.html
http://fibrr.records.free.fr
http://vertpituite.lautre.net

Scott Smallwood
Electrotherapy
USA DEEP LISTENING DL 29-2004 CD (2004)

What's this?! More and more modern composers are increasingly drawn away from the traditional sources of inspiration – trees, birds, and baskets of hot, fresh bread – and are turning towards the world of physics for new ideas! Smallwood hasn't been slow to jump on this particular bandwagon. His new CD is derived from the sounds made y early 20th century scientific devices, of a sort usually found in electrical engineering and hospital laboratories – induction coils, a diathermy machine, a UV ray oscillator, and even a Wimshurst machine! And where did he find these uncanny objects? In the hands of collector Peter Barvoets, that's where; Barvoets is thus an unknowing participant in this thrilling new trend.

Well, I suppose this is an entertaining enough record as far as it goes. Scott has applied two basic treatments here: first, 'straight' documentary recordings of the devices doing their respective things. This results in a fairly engaging set of crackling and whirring sounds; 'Energex' is a particularly amusing episode of humming noises. Second, reprocessed sounds, creating form of lite-digital glitch music with minimal disco-beats. Of the two, you've gotta prefer method 1; when Smallwood starts trying to turn these recordings into 'music', it's largely boring, sounding surprisingly similar to all the other dull identikit electronica out

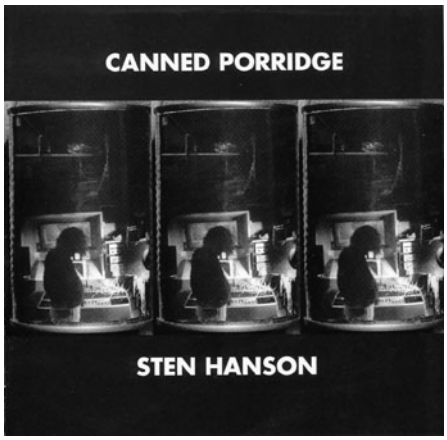
there. 'Sunkraft' isn't far from being a dancefloor chill-out zone track - bland, mind-numbing, banality.

One looks in vain for any attempt on composer's part to engage more deeply with the scientific devices, to understand their function; for example, what is a Wimshurst machine? As it happens I know the answer to that, because my grandfather had one in his basement. But do we learn anything more about the culture of science from hearing the sounds made by these machines? And does Scott even care? Not much, probably. To be fair, this probably isn't Scott's intention, but if that's the case then he comes across as something of a wide-eyed 'gee-whiz' sort of guy, amazed at the surface properties of an unusual object ('Hey, that sounds weird! I'll record it!') while understanding little of its purpose.

ED PINSENT 28/09/2004
www.deeplistening.org

Sten Hanson
Canned Porridge
SWEDEN FIREWORK EDITION RECORDS FER 1048 2 x CD (2004)

Gracious! A bounteous double-CD set by this major Swedish sound-poet and composer, a pioneer from the 1950s onwards, still alive and celebrated by those in the know. Was noted last ish both for his remarkable solo CD *Text-Sound Gems and Trinkets* (also on the Firework Edition label), and his appearances on the Henri Chopin *Revue OU*



boxed set, in the company of the 'chosen few' that formed the elite-corps known as 'Chopin's Chaps'. This massive set – 2 full length discs, 150 minutes of sound and music – still can't even make a dent on the stockpile of Hanson's work (he's released 83 recordings in his career). But it will help to broaden our understanding. Compared to *Gems and Trinkets* which was all sound poetry, this collection provides a more complete picture of the interior contours of his creative sconce, since he works in many areas – sound art, poetry, text-sound composition, music, electronics, field recordings…and he is not averse to collaborations, so not a few joint works grace this comp also. Of course like all strong-minded artists, he purports to hate labels. Labels kill ideas. He won't kill his ideas. And if there's one thing Hanson has a lot of, it's ideas.

Unfortunately, they weren't always great ideas; and since he seemed to record and release on a fairly prolific basis, this set seems (to me) a bit variable in quality. I still love this guy and look forward to the day when he gives me a big bear-hug, but even I found this one heavy going in places. Then again, the good pieces are exceptionally great. Take 'L'inferno de Strindberg', a superbly imaginative work from 1970. If any artist had just created this piece alone, they could die a happy man. Natch, it's a tribute to another Swedish cultural icon: August Strindberg, who was a loopy and depressing writer who wrote a novel in the 19th century about the mental persecutions he was suffering. Sten Hanson, when invited to contribute a new work to a text-sound festival in Stockholm, clearly thought this was a suitable choice of subject matter. He does a convincing job replicating in sound the terrifying effects of mental illness, using voice and tape manipulation. It's a baffling mix of barks, whispers and sped-up voices (some of them speaking weirdly in French), distorted with filters, reverb and like that, and the stereo mix is used to make you feel like the voices are springing from everywhere at once. A genius statement!

'Double Extension' also comes from 1970 – and another goodie it be, a collaboration with Henri Chopin. The basic material was Chopin's voice and his unique microphone technique (unspecified, but you know it's gotta be something pretty obscene involving his lips), while the subsequent treatments and structure of the piece was left to Hanson. Result: a bunch of kiss-sucking gaspo noise and breath effects, mixed with strange attenuated whines; genius gibberish is moulded into pure art. Chopin is one of the few guys in this genre who really rocks! John Cage also rocked of course, but in a different way…Hanson (like so many others) decided to pay tribute to him in sound, after Cage paid a visit to the Fylkingen society in 1978. 'The Flight of the Bumble Bee Variations' was the result. A single basic phrase is repeated multiple times – and subjected to multiple treatments, some of them pretty wild, with filters, ring modulators, that sort of thing. The use of basic repetition to get the point across effectively is one of Hanson's trademarks when it comes to concrete poetry. This piece is 14 minutes of garbled concept-burbling, and it's most excellent.

Further evidence of said trademark is the superb 1988 composition, 'Lettre d'un étranger à C'. Here, overlapping voice phrases hammer home the meaning – and what a meaning it is. Derived from the emotional torture he suffered following the break-up of a relationship, this is fantastically emotionally resonant piece. The phrases may have been plucked from actual letters. Even if not, you still feel drowned in the words that are filled with real pain; then, through the overlapping and repetitions, words lose their meaning, and are reduced to grating barks. The whole piece slowly constricts its own ability to communicate. A real shocker.

Also scoring high quality marks are the two 'wolf' themed pieces, 'Winter of the Wolves' and 'Arctic Spring'. Who could resist these? They combine recordings of wolf howls with barking synth noises and, of course, howling wind sound effects. Very effective quietly sinister environments, even if they are kind of literal in narrative intent, but constitute recent (2002) evidence that the old fart still has his chops. They're autobiographical; Hanson recalls these sounds with fondness, a childhood where there were 'sounds contrasting with a great silence'. Not far, you'll have to admit, from the celebrated La Monte Young memory of the wind outside his childhood log cabin.

All those above are indisputable meisterworks. I wasn't so persuaded by the rest of the collection, but it's bound to have some takers. The most bewildering one is 'Musique Montgolfier – the Lund Experience', which is 29 minutes long – a length which seems disproportionate to its value and content. For the 1988 event of which this is a documentary recording, Sten Hanson and his collaborators pranced around in the open air as a marching band with traditional instruments, and four hot-air balloons which they dragged around behind them. Oh, and eight horses as well. The eccentricity of this 'action' makes it potentially interesting…but what ends up on disc is muffled and diffuse, non-eventful and chaotic blither. Performance art at its least engaging…that's on the 2nd disc, which opens with another fine example of Swedish loopiness, 'Extrasensory Compositions II'. This is Hanson's democratic way of bringing in performers who have zero musical skills; we get the slightly comic effect of Olov Franzén's musical saw mixed with the whooping non-operatic squeals of Kerstin Ståhl's voice. But the live electronics make up for everything…

There are also, on disc one, three 'Conversation' pieces from 1978 with the American pianist Michael J Smith (a kind of jazz-classical crossover guy), on which Hanson makes discreet purring noises with his Buchla synth. All three possess rather perplexing 'blank' qualities; the first two are particularly slow and cold, and I found them very hard to engage with. 'Nightwoods II' is a pretty good clarinet and tape composition; puffing, barking and strange peeps abound, along with the sound of player moaning and groaning around his mouthpiece. I enjoy the idea of the theme ('monsters, ghosts and thoughts hidden deep in the subconscious') more than the music here, but at least it's better than the tedium of 'Nightwoods IV'.

The least successful piece here is 'From Blackbird to Chaos', a 2002 commission for the King of Sweden. This one's a tape collage for some state event or other, and purports to be 'characteristic of Stockholm sounds from the last 750 years'. So, there's blackbirds, organs, church bells, street markets, trains, blacksmiths, brass bands…every cliché from field recording you can think of, in fact, arranged in a tedious, linear, story-telling fashion. Frankly, this is the kind of thing put together by unimaginative provincial museum directors for their wretched stodgy exhibitions of 'local life in the community as it was'; hard to believe a genius like Hanson could bring himself to deliver something of this degree of banality.

Even this long review hasn't covered the entirety of this collection, and even if I have some reservations about the quality control, what kind of an upstart am I to complain about it? I've no right to do so. This man is one of the few sound-art creators around today who is genuinely worthy of the epithet 'living legend'. Speaking for our own country, I can only wish that the work of Bob Cobbing was represented in the same quantity and same degree of detail.

ED PINSENT 31/10/2004
Sigfridsvägen 6, 126 50 Hägersten, Sweden
www.fireworkeditionrecords.com

Various Artists
Labor CD: Labor Sonor / KuLe / Berlin
GERMANY CHARIZMA 026/027 2 x CD (2003)

A fairly strong compilation put together by Steffi Weismann and Nicholas Bussmann, which surveys current and happening sounds in Berlin just now; specifically, artists and musicians associated with the performance space KuLe. In fact it's not simply sound, but gallery art and installations also; the music occupies disc one, while video delights of 'cross-platform' artworks await viewer on disc two. The music surveyed includes most of the improvisers associated with the large group Phosphor, whose work is not unknown to this mag; in fact their opener is one of the strongest pieces on the disc, a confident blast of assured all-together atonal droning. Another related area is Alessandro Bossetti and his friends, who were well represented on the Berlin Reeds comp of last year – including Gregor Hotz, whose contribution here is a maddening slice of conceptual modernism which has superficial trappings of 'jazz', with no heart, soul or swing to it. It ain't all improv though, as some artistes do 'songs' and deem it worthy to vouchsafe their world-views unto us in said form; Margareth Kammerer's brand of warbling is OK (see elsewhere for her solo CD), but Asi Föcker is irritating beyond belief. In addition there's usual fair share of electronic material, or manipulation of acoustic instruments using electronic processing; despite some occasional lapses into the 'synthetic', *Labor* is mostly a document of authentic, convincing performances, and the recording quality is exceptionally vivid and crisp, enabling listeners to appreciate better the depth, solemnity and precision of these performances.

ED PINSENT 19/09/2004
www.charizma.com
www.echtzeitmusik.com

Steve Roden
Speak no more about the leaves
PORTUGAL SIRR.ECORDS SIRR 2015 CD (2003)

A gorgeous voice poetry / sound art musical record from this wispy American. Roden's starting point was *The Book of the Hanging Gardens*, a musical piece by Arnold Schönberg, which is settings of poems by Stefan George. Clearly deeply struck by the beauty of both the writing and the musical work, Roden recorded himself reading and gently singing the text. But not as written; the text was broken down into constituent syllables, and he reads them in alphabetical order. There's clearly a strong John Cage influence detectable in his method of composition, ie taking a known classical text, pulling it to pieces for his own purposes, and in the atomisation of his voice. One thinks of Cage and how he kept returning to the works of Thoreau and James Joyce, or his *Empty Words* performance…Cage has I think also broken down written texts into vocables, and read them aloud in structured systems, sometimes with live electronic noise by David Tudor. Roden's 'syllables arranged in alphabetical order' method constitutes track one; fear not, gentle listener, if ye abhor and detest the smack of any sort of dry conceptual art. The music is beautiful. It's a set of ghostly, attenuated voices forming a lapping rhythm just like waves against the shore or a babbling brook. The voices strain to make their way through filters, barely audible, and suspended in a tinkling 'soup' of quiet sound. For the second track, Roden plays chimes – using, as a score, the vowels he took from the rearranged text. Again, very Cagean. This one has existed as an art installation; composer's preference is that it be left on repeat play to create desirable environment. Both the first and second tracks are exemplary exercises in serenity; they genuinely make the listener shut up, sit up, freeze, listen and enjoy. Can't enthuse in like manner for third track, which is somewhat more conventional electronica by comparison. To produce it, he used sampled fragments from a recording of the original Schönberg music, along with further fragments from his own singing tapes. Though not quite in same 'sublime' league as rest of this disc, admittedly this piece is still highly unusual. Images on the cover are by Marc Behrens, the notorious ultra-minimal composer; and this adds up to another minimalist 'goodie' from this label.

ED PINSENT 07/10/2004
Rua Cidade Nova Lisboa 220, 5A, 1800 Lisboa, Portugal
sirr-ecords@sirr-ecords.com
www.sirr-ecords.com

EDWARD RUCHALSKI

Picture by Rebecca Klossner

QUESTIONS FROM THE SOUND PROJECTOR CONDUCTED BY EMAIL OCTOBER 2004

EP What are the sound sources that go into your work?

ER Mostly unprocessed field recordings, or field recordings that focus on resonance picked up by placing microphones in various found objects, such as pipes, bottles or hollow trees. I'm often looking for environmental sounds that complement my instruments. I also use homemade instruments that focus on a single sound or a small combination of sounds. Usually I build an instrument, or collect objects to use as percussion, for specific pieces. I like to pick up things that I find along the side of the road, or that other people throw away. I like to be resourceful and stick to a budget. I have a small collection of artillery casings that I use in place of expensive gongs. I bought my first artillery casing at a flea market for $5 while searching for a gong-like sound. In *Nohl Mix*, the main sound source is five portable turntables and a stack of 78's given to me by my friend, Phil Nohl. Each turntable has four speeds (16, 33, 45 and 78) and a separate control for fine tuning. I spent hours experimenting. I would put a 78 on each turntable and listen to them all at once, adjust the individual speeds and listen for any interesting sound combinations. In the end, I decided not to use any prerecorded music. I was much more fascinated with the hiss and crackling sounds at the beginning of each record,

or the pulse that the needle made when it skipped at the end of the recording.

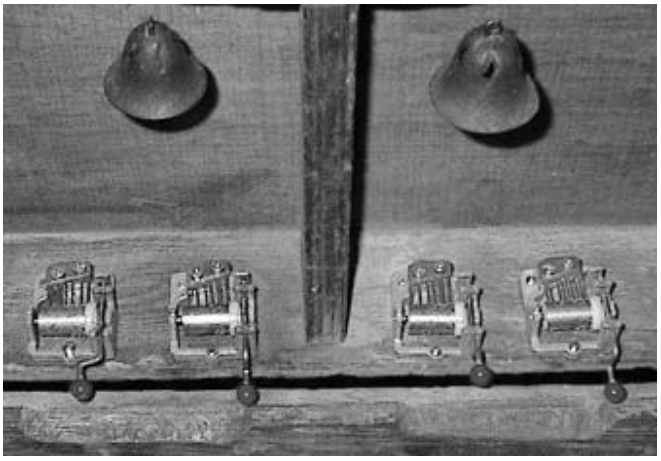
EP What methods do you use to generate or capture these sources?

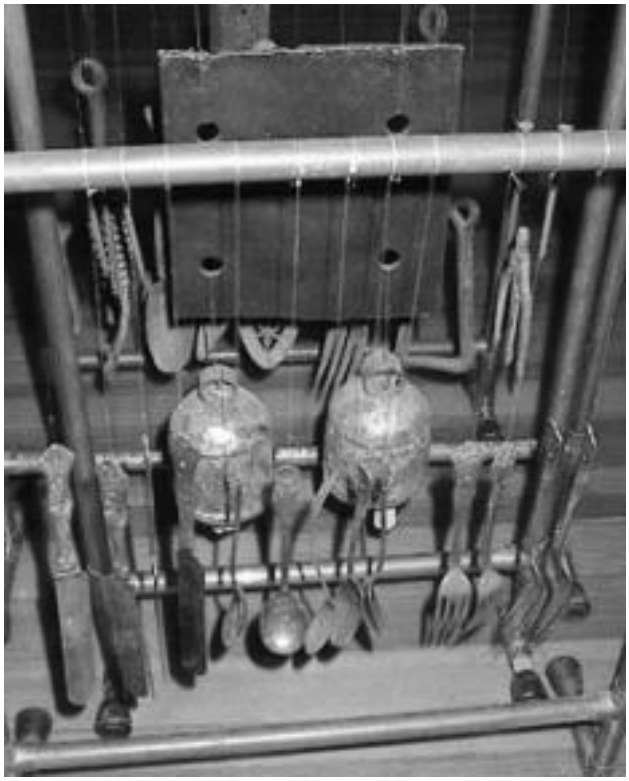
ER Mostly, a lot of listening and experimenting. Then, deep concentration while recording. I don't like to alter or process any sounds after I record them. I'm always trying to capture a performance, even in my field recordings. And if I don't like the sound through my headphones at the time of recording, then I'll try to alter the sound by microphone placement. If I'm at home recording instruments, I'll experiment by changing the length of a motor arm or by using different mallets or guitar slides. I spend a lot of time trying to get the proper attack of a note. I still work very much like I used to when I was composing for string quartets and other conventional instruments. Except now, it's up to me to create or locate each specific sound I want in a piece.

EP How long would it take you to complete a work such as *Moveable Sites*?

ER From start to finish, *Moveable Sites* took just over a year to complete. Some of the material I had for years and didn't know what to do with, like 'Snake Story' and 'Private Harmonies'. With 'Snake Story', I had the structure of the voice recording, but I didn't know how to orchestrate it until I found an interesting tuning on one of my zithers. I had the opposite problem with 'Private Harmonies'. I had the combination of instruments I wanted, that is the orchestration, but no material or structure. All I could hear in my head was the timbre of each instrument and its relationship to the timbre of another instrument. I kept composing scores in graphic notation that determined how these various timbres would be organized, but the results were uninteresting. I was convinced if I found the right structure, everything else would fall into place. Finally, it occurred to me that I needed to focus on detail. I decided to drop the graphs and improvise, focusing on recording a series of short gestures that were musically interesting. I gradually built a library of musical statements, and then, looked for the structure that they suggested. Once I did that, the piece seemed to write itself.

EP How do you go about planning your work?





ER I experiment a lot, and make notes and structural diagrams. But usually I drop it all. My work is more successful when I'm intuitive. However, I think all the planning is necessary and somehow it all gets filtered in. But I never stick to a plan completely.

EP How does the finished work evolve?

ER In my latest work, *Music for Field Recordings and Acoustic Guitar*, I made a field recording of a place I found interesting. That meant spending time experimenting at the location: deciding what kind of weather I wanted to record in, what time of day, whether I was going to walk or stand, wear my binaurals, or place them somewhere in a tree or pipe. After I got an interesting recording, I transferred it to my computer. Then I would make a few edits, overlap some sounds, repeat a few of the more musical gestures. In other words, trying to keep it close to what I heard but at the same time, giving it structure. At this point, I would have the basic character and duration of the piece. After living with it for awhile, I would start to hear things that should go along with the field recording. I'd record them using my instruments and integrate them into the field recording. That would be the second layer of the process. With this work, I knew I wanted to have a melodic guitar part. My intention, after working on field recordings, was to write the guitar parts. But basically what happened was that I just had a sense of what I wanted, sat down, played guitar, and recorded without thinking too much about it. That seemed to work for all four parts of the work. I tend to perform better when I'm improvising off a chart, or in this case a phrase. So, that was basically it. The biggest change I made in my process was to purposely slow it down. I didn't want to just rush through things in order to get to a finished project.

EP How long have you been creating home-made instruments?

ER Since 1989. I started by collecting car parts, pipes, flower pots, old pans, anything that had an interesting sound. All percussion, though. Then, a few years later, I started making monochords (single stringed instruments used to study tunings).

EP What are the individual functions or uses of your instruments?

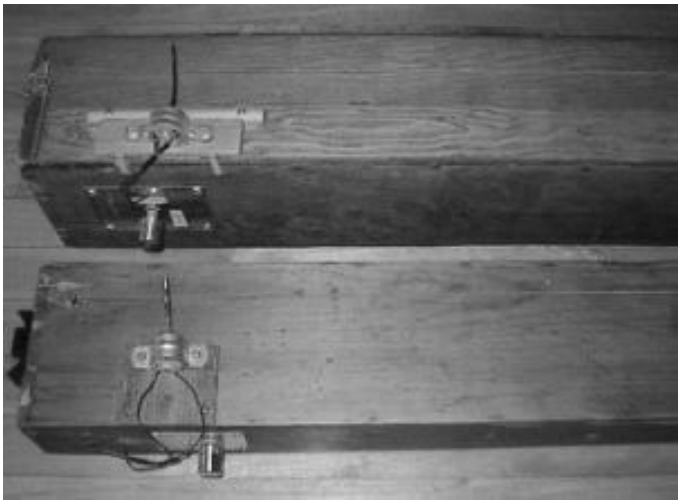
ER The function of the motor instruments is to focus on a single sound. The box guitars are monochords. I took an old wooden tool box, used the bottom of the box as the soundboard with a single guitar string running the length of it, placed a felt-padded motor directly on the soundboard, perpendicular to the string, so the arm of the motor would rotate across the string. Then I placed a PCM microphone under the box. At first, I played around with drones. Then, I realized by moving the microphone, and also changing the speed of the motor, I could bring out different frequencies, or harmonics. With a moveable bridge, or a guitar slide, I could quickly, or slowly, change the fundamental pitch. The motor plates function almost in the same way. A metal or steel plate is suspended on a copper frame with a motor suspended above the plate. The rotating arm of the motor, which is part of a guitar string, touches the top of the plate, causing the plate to vibrate. The percussion racks function as chimes. I like to play them slowly and create different patterns. Same with the music boxes. Most of them aren't wound, but played by hand so that phrase lengths and tempi may constantly vary. I altered them by filing away notes, so the melodies are my own. The music box melodies are almost identical to each other. So by playing several at the same time, I can create interesting rhythmic and melodic variations.

EP Do you work mostly in isolation?

ER Yes.

EP How do you choose collaborators?

ER I don't collaborate as much as I would like to. The few



people I do work with are close friends, so maybe that's how I choose.

EP Are you interested in telling stories with your work?

ER No, not really. I've tried to tell a few stories, but only when I use voice. I'd rather each listener find his or her own story while listening. A lot of people tell me they hear stories in my music. Maybe that has something to do with the mood or the linear quality of my music. I'm really much more interested in recreating a sense of place. Anyway, I think it's best when stories are left out of music, both while composing, and while listening.

EP How long have you lived in New York State?

ER Almost my entire life. I was born here, and except for the three years I went to school in Florida, I've lived here, either in Buffalo or Syracuse.

EP Are you connected with any other musicians or musical activities there?

ER I had my own ensemble for about five years. I composed a lot of music for the ensemble and I would record every time we performed. I even recorded the rehearsals. After the ensemble broke up, I spent about a year listening to everything and ended up dissatisfied with most of the work. I think having an ensemble helped me more as a performer than as a composer. Since then, I've preferred to work alone and at a much slower pace. I wanted to focus on studio work meant to be heard on a stereo. Lately, especially with the guitar pieces, I'm starting to write music that could be performed. So hopefully, when the time is right, I'll put another group together.

EP Do you conceive each release as a total work, that is served best by listening start to finish?

ER Yes. But I also keep in mind that each track should also stand on its own.

EP Do you feel any sympathies with Surrealist painting, poetry or cinema?

ER In painting, I've always favored Abstract Expressionism. Although, in the last few years I've been less interested in that, and more interested in people like Candy Jernigan and Charles Burchfield. There's a real playfulness in Jernigan's work that I really enjoy. Burchfield is one of the only painters, I think, to have successfully painted sound without being scientific or pretentious. I haven't been reading much poetry lately. I've been really interested in Thomas Bernhard's books, though. They're very musical. He'll get stuck on a word, or a phrase, and repeat it over and over. At first, it's beautiful, then funny. By the time it gets aggravating, he somehow moves on and gets stuck on something else. With most of his books, you know on the first page or two what's going to happen, but it doesn't happen until near the end of the book, and by then it's no longer the point. With film, I don't really care for action films, or plot driven films. I prefer films that really give a sense of time, like with Kieslowski or Tarkovsky.

EP Have you ever made cinema of your own?

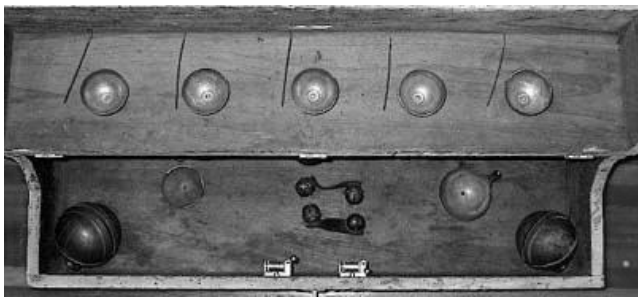
ER For a while I made videos. A friend lent me his camera and I spent a few months playing around. Then he moved and needed it back, and that was the end of that. I did compose scores for some short films and videos in the past, though. But, it's funny, I prefer films that have very little sound, especially very little music. If I were going to work in film or video again, I'd be most interested in making a documentary.

EP How did your work come to be released on the Humbug label?

ER Bryan Day (Public Eyesore) thought Anders Gjerde (Humbug) would be interested in my music so he introduced us through email. Anders released *Moveable Sites* on CDR and then later, *Having It Out* on LP.

EP What other works have been published or released?

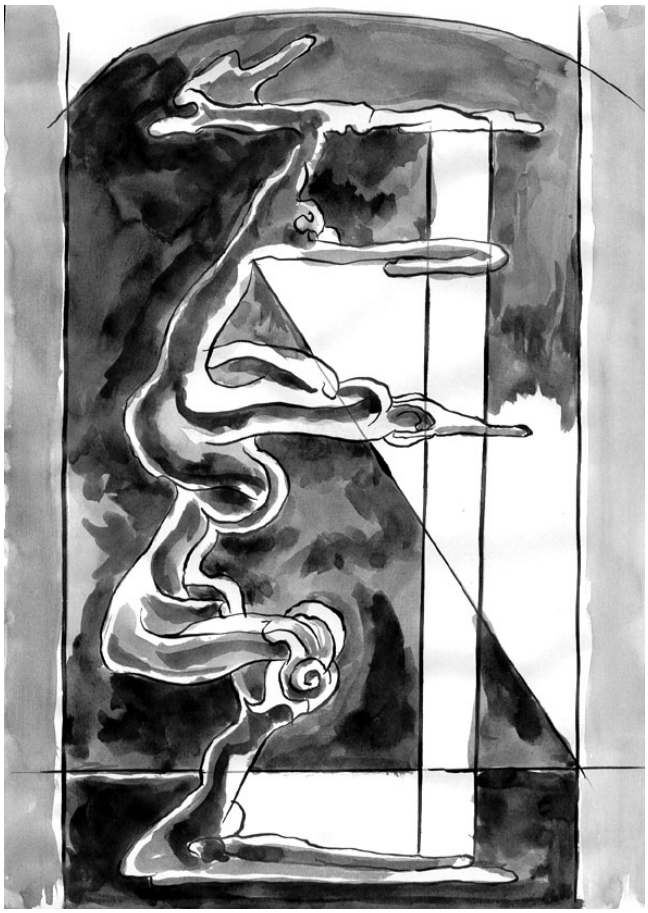
ER The French label Taalem released *Refined Localities (Part One)* on 3" CDr. It's a long, single movement that uses several field recordings and motor instruments as sound sources. *Having It Out*, which was originally released as side A of the Humbug LP, was reissued on 3" CDr by Pseudoarcana. Most recently, Brad Rose released *Dark Night* on his CDr Foxglove series for Digitalis. That's all that's out there as of now. Although, *Music for Field Recordings and Acoustic Guitar* will be available within the next month or two on Pseudoarcana. Also, a revised version of my first recording, *Radio Journal*, will soon be released on Humbug.



EP What is your personal artistic motivation to create sound-art?

ER To immerse myself in sound. Somehow, it's the only way I feel connected with the rest of the world. It keeps me interested in life. And I become less negative about things when I'm working, or involved with sound. Sound makes me pay attention to other things besides myself. It's the primary way I want to communicate and I hope to make something interesting that might be of value to others. ☐

http://www.geocities.com/rchlsk/ed.html



Keith Rowe by FP

Various Artists

Amplify02: Balance

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 033-040 8 x CD BOX SET (2003)

Since 1999, Jon Abbey's Erstwhile label has pretty much concentrated on representing music where electro-acoustic meets improvisation. Along the way they've also represented a fair bit of what has been variously labelled as 'Onkyo' music, reduced improvisation, or quiet improv. Abbey was inspired to found the label mainly by what he saw at the Mottomo Otomo Festival in Austria; that same festival, curated by Otomo, is apparently where the 'Onkyo' tag started to stick, referring to a species of extremely quiet and focused playing taking place on the side-stages, mostly among Japanese players. It may have had its origins in the Bar Aoyama venue in Tokyo. Despite boasts that more material would be forthcoming, we only saw one measly CD (on the Trost label) issued from the mighty Otomo festival. Jon Abbey beats that hands down, and sets a new standard for comprehensiveness with this massive box set; there's a full-length CD covering every night of the October 2002 festival that he organised in Tokyo, plus a CD's worth of music from the fringe shows; and a studio recording made at the same time, plus a DVD of visual impressions of the events. Something of a feast. Jon Abbey has become influential; he's not just documenting the music, he's now shaping the way it's perceived and organising a platform for it on the world stage.

What's it all about? Deliberation could be one key word we keep coming back to. There was a very deliberate choice made to achieve a balance in the nationality of the invited musicians (there's roughly an equal number of Japanese players and European players). The same balance goes for the selection of musicians, the programming of the events and the arrangement of the CDs, about which more below. Interestingly, it seems that guitarist Taku Sugimoto believes – or perhaps wishes - that quiet improv / reduced playing / Onkyo music is already dead. He would like the *Amplify02* box set to be its tombstone, its burial marker. His reason seems predicated on the fact that 'everyone' knows about it by now, and that's a certain sign of death. This is indeed a reliable indicator of the shrewd artist, the one who always stays three steps ahead of the media, the glib commentators who dearly love to pigeon-hole everything. It's weird that the more we 'notice' new things, and the more information we spread about them, they somehow become safer as a result, and less attention is paid to them. (I should know…I think *The Sound Projector* is part of the same problem).

Every musician was asked to add a short statement to the booklet. One discernible pattern in many of their remarks is a certain kind of solipsism, as though forgetting the history of music, forgetting the history of anything. One musician is 'amazed' the someone can even organise a concert, as if no-one had ever done it before. Some kind of selective amnesia, an eternal sunshine of the spotless mind, with a memory as empty as the famous empty sampler of Sachiko M. It's as though this music is so new, that it effaces any sense of history; the idea of a 'tabula rasa' seems appropriate, as if to say 'music starts here now'. So far Keith Rowe is the only one who gives any indication that improvised music even has a history. Even so, he's prefer to leave that history behind; he welcomes the move 'away from the visceral chic that has characterised much of improvised music'.

This is just by way of delivering a completely unnecessary preface to the music, although in keeping with this tabula rasa notion you may find it convenient to leave behind many of your preconceptions about what

constitutes normal music, or conventional listening pleasure. It's a very quiet box for the most part. It is more than just a document of the event; the idea behind doing such a large-scale box set is partly to emulate the experience of the actual concerts, and create an artefact that will 'reward numerous repeated listens'. Amplify itself was predicated on the idea of letting each performance enhance / improve / frame / amplify the next one; its chosen emblem is a bold EQUALS sign (=) inside a white disc, confirming the idea that the musical statements are arranged in some form of equation, one that helps them add up to something more than they are.

Abbey spent considerable care an attention in arranging the sequence of the programme to do precisely this. The balance of nationalities was extended to present 12 'balanced' groups over three nights. Four of these combos were all Japanese, four were all European, and the remaining four a mixed economy. Likewise, the ordering of the box set follows a simple structure: the core recordings of the festival are placed, in strict date order, as the central discs 3-6. These are framed on either side by discs 1 and 7 which are the smaller shows outside the main arena, programmed by Toshimaru and Taku. In between falls disc 2, a studio recording. Disc 8 is the DVD including interviews, extracts from performances, and visual impressions of the event, by film-maker Jonas Leddington.

In a way this may say more about Jon Abbey's aspirations than it does about the music, but he has successfully enabled the music to speak and to resonate. Despite its apparent linearity, this strategy is in fact very sympathetic to the non-hierarchical methods of modern reduced playing. The music gains more from being heard in context, among an assembly of like-minded and co-operative creators, than by standing alone. That said, all the music has strength; any one of the discs could be released on its own as a convincing statement. Perhaps the gathering at Tokyo was a useful gathering point for all these vectors; it may have become a site filled with creative and collective energies. Christof Kurzmann saw it all as a very positive alternative to the way that society was conducting its affairs in 2003. 'Now is war,' he observed. 'We don't have to go to war with one another.'

Disc 1 comprises four live cuts from the Off Site, Appel and Gendai Heights venues in Tokyo. Thomas Lehn, Toshimaru Nakamura, Tetuzi Akiyama, Günter Müller, Christof Kurzmann and Taku Sugimoto slug it out in various combos, mostly in the field of electronic minimalism. Each piece is a tremendous immersive experience of quiet, continuous humming and electricity, with a little bit of sparse guitar noting from Taku and Tetuzi when they appear. A great set of openers for the box. An initiation for the listener, gently swept by the tides into uncharted territory. Listening to this, one is acutely aware of how much noise pollution there is in the world. Music like this sharpens such awareness. Why can't we stay in this idyllic state for longer? Of these four, the 24:08 piece by Christof and Toshi is the most spectacular. One G3 and feedback. That's all that's needed for a solid belt of understated power. Why select these musicians? 'They all share an important characteristic,' says Abbey. 'They try to strip instruments and sound down to the bare essence.'

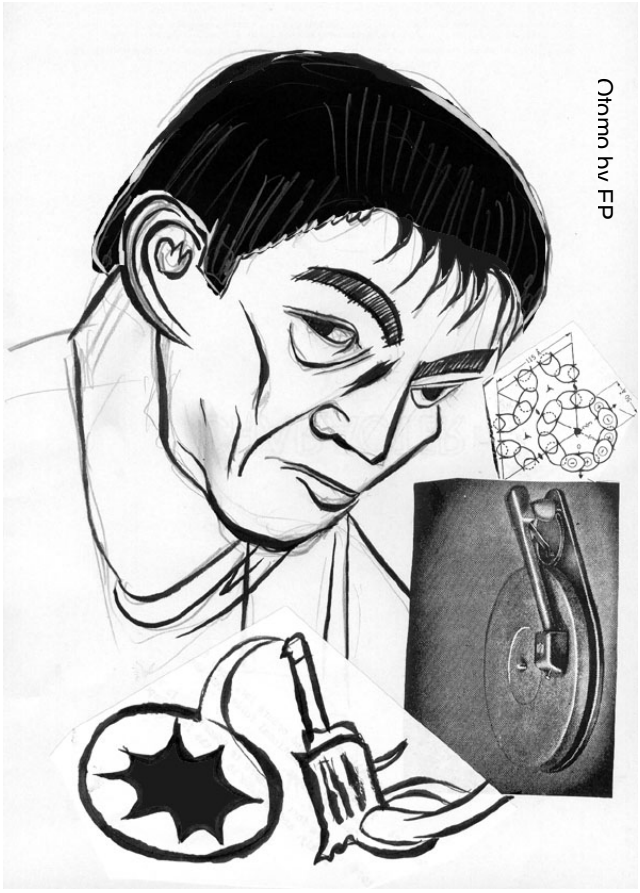
Even if you never manage to listen to the box set in one sitting, the sequencing strategy is clearly massively important – and that's already clear by end of disc one. The continuousness of the music is what's vital, its non-stop progression from one set of interpreters to another. There's no real beginning or end to any of this music, in the conventional sense; it's all a continuum. Importantly, audience applause (if any) has been edited out completely, allowing a seamless flow of music across all the discs. Which isn't to say it all sounds identical! This is part of the business of recreating the festival experience for the listener at home, removing evidence of the live audience and leaving you with the pure sound to deal with. It's a way of building relationships, bringing out hidden depths and dimensions. See the *Haunted Weather* compilation for David Toop's similar approach (and to similar areas of music, as it happens). To reverse the dictum of Brecht, this is art is not a hammer…it is a mirror!

Disc 2, for example, is noticeably noisier than its neighbour (especially the heavy pulsing tracks mixed by Müller). It's all studio tracks by Toshimaru and Müller, five musical variations on the basic 'Tint' theme. Well, not really. Very gritty, very good, a lot of activity, events, texture and noise. These strong and heavy mega-drones are blended with random static burst attacks, and electronified bloopiness of all stripe. Real 'punk rock' electro-acoustic! Well, not really. The deep undersea 'rumbling' effect of #3 is particularly enjoyable. This dynamo of a disc would easily stand up as a separate Erstwhile release.

Another subtext theme for you: uncertainty. No-one, the musicians, least of all, knows what is going on. Many of them are unclear about how this music works, whether it does work, or indeed in some cases whether it can even be considered to be music at all. Some of them claim that they never what they're going to play or do next; they had no idea what direction each performance was heading, where it was going to end up, or how they would know when they'd got there. Even one reviewer present at the event felt a palpable air of uncertainty hanging like a cloud across all three days. Odd, eh? Perhaps instead of the EQUALS sign, the chosen emblem for Amplify 02 should be a huge question mark (?). Whether this equates to fresh, new and exciting music is almost beside the point. Everyone's life is filled with doubt. Perhaps we need to be reminded of that fact more often. Increasingly, rampant monopoly capitalism is doing everything in its power to eliminate the element of doubt from our lives completely. What advertising offers, or purports to offer, is the temptation of 'financial security' in whatever form it may arrive, as the cure-all to all your fears and uncertainties. With money, there is no room for doubt. So in that context at least, a huge (?) is very welcome here.

Disc 3 – and the festival itself finally begins. Cosmos play for 24:35 and deliver the goods. An amazing piece of nothingness made sublime by these highly gifted women. The strangled whine of the great Ami Yoshida, with nothing more than a single faint monotone from the plugged-in Sachiko M. Although their *Tears* CD is a great one, it's like progressive rock next to this performance, which is extreme and pure like hard crystal. Then comes Keith Rowe with Lehn and Marcus Schmickler. Lehn has the analogue synth, Marcus the digital one. Over 40 extraordinary minutes, we hear such queasy and unfamiliar sounds as to induce musical indigestion. And in one of the more dynamic performances here, their act is filled with surprises and unexpected turns. Now noisy, now quiet; now rolling a boulder uphill with tremendous effort, now stopped dead. Creates effect of a surreal dream where gravity is irrelevant, and floating entities hang suspended in a fiery sky. Nearly impossible music, mostly just mysterious.

Disc four, festival day two…and another two long tracks. The pairing of Otomo Yoshihide with Müller is an inspired choice. I get the feeling the Otomo's noise quotient is back on the increase, by degrees, after having reduced himself to virtually nothing with his ISO experiments a few years



back. Their duo piece rumbles fiercely in delicious inchoate manner, tiny statements floating in a huge ocean of crackle, stutter and beepery. Warm smothering masses of electrical kapok descend upon you like a blanket. Otomo plays some electric guitar and his silent turntable, so that familiar scraping-wheel effect surfaces occasionally among the general murkiness, along with a few dense and monosyllabic 'thunks' from his guitar.

Lehn and Schmickler are slightly more aggressive on this disc, their two synths locked in a friendly tussle, spitting and growling at each other like two feral monkeys in a cage. Grr. These two really shone on the *Rabbit Run* CD, where they managed to bring our the 'beast' in Keith Rowe in that very impolite and raucous session. This cut certainly stands out as the spikiest one on *Amplify 02*; the analogue technology clashing with the digital sounds. Neither one separates out completely and instead they meld into one another, creating a vital, mutating mass of boiling, dripping stew.

At this point I noticed that none of the pieces have any titles, with the exception of the Cardew composition (which we're slowly moving towards). The works are identified exclusively by who played them; the performers *are* the work. Removal of 'titles' is another manifestation of the general anoymisation trend; the elimination of yet another associative, interpretative element, bringing the possibility of preconceived associations from the audience/listener, clearly seen as unnecessary and something that gets in the way of pure sound as sound. The (?) symbol is becoming more and more apt. The 12 players are merging together in the gene pool, becoming part of the single organic, cosmic life-force where your personal artistic identity is far less relevant than your contribution to the whole.

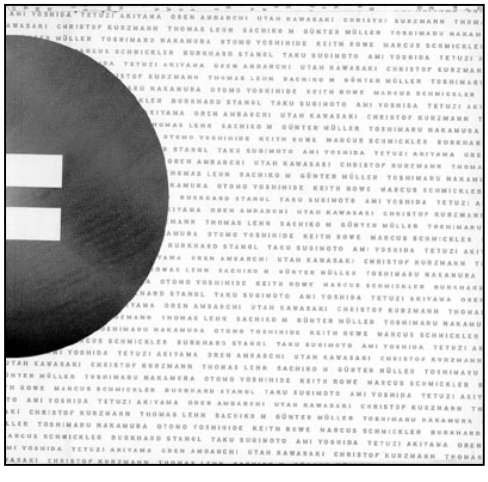
Sugimoto and Stangl turn in a 24:00 guitar (mainly) piece, with the murmuring G3 backdrop of Kurzmann, for the opener on Disc 5. This is perhaps the most beautiful piece of music on the whole box. The beautiful dreamscape it proposes is quite heavenly, a necessary counterpoint to the noisiness of the predecessor disc, further evidence that the sequencing programme is still working in the background. One of the guitarists (I presume it's Taku) manages a single strum about once every ten minutes. Not much to say. But he hits the right notes. Disc 5 is clearly the ultra-quiet disc, because when this trio have finished in come Rowe and Toshi with an incredibly minimal fizzing and foaming piece at 31:49. First half is mostly amplifier hum and gentle crackle. The players gently martial the invisible waves of electrical hum into shapes, textures, almost-rhythms, almost-patterns. One gets the feeling they were barely moving at all. Then they become practically motionless. As though daring each other to investigate further realms of starkness, silence and emptiness, they allow the work to grow more and more attenuated. It shrinks, dwindles away into a microdot of pinpoint-laser sound, until it vanishes altogether.

And just when you thought the nothingness couldn't get any more reduced, along comes disc 6. The second track here is created by two of the magisters of Japanese emptiness, Sachiko M and Toshimaru Nakamura. Theirs turns out to be the most testing piece on the box set. No patters, no rhythm, hardly even any logical continuity. One single very high-pitched sine wave meets up with Toshi's feedback growl and purr, interspersed with silent gaps. Can appear to be almost random, but isn't; it's a perfectly controlled statement, and exceedingly difficult to endure and get a purchase on. It's preceded by a very dark piece by Stangl and Müller, about the most sullen and sulky work in the box. Introverted, electronic muttering; they're both stuck in a rather cramped and uncommunicative position and won't come out. Stangl's constipated guitar strums, almost grudgingly, against low-frequency grumbling from the Swiss recluse. In all, this tends to make Disc 6 into the 'Bad Day at Black Rock' amongst an otherwise fairly sunny and airy festival.

The 7th and final audio disc featured the massed guitars of Rowe, Stangl, Sugimoto, Akiyama, Nakamura, Otomo, and Australian guest star Oren Ambarchi. Their 'showcase' is a performance of a Cornelius Cardew piece, an extract from his opus Treatise. This is notable because it's the only recording on the entire set to have a title (see above). It's also one of the few links to the past history of avant-garde and improvised music. I feel fairly safe in guessing it was Rowe's idea; a tribute to AMM, and to Cardew's role in that group, and perhaps to his old friend with whom he once shared, I think, not a few Maoist notions. No Maoist content in Treatise though, which dates from 1963-1967 and exists as a complicated graphic score; perhaps it's the open-endedness of it (questions of what to play and how to play it are left to the performers' discretion) that makes it an entirely apt choice for Amplify. Here, it emerges as a remarkable example of restraint by seven talented and strong-willed fellows; they seem to be feeling their way around the piece, taking ginger-careful steps. The considerable mass and depth of the composition gradually reveals itself over the course of 30 minutes, during which time the players appear to be floating weightlessly in mid-air.

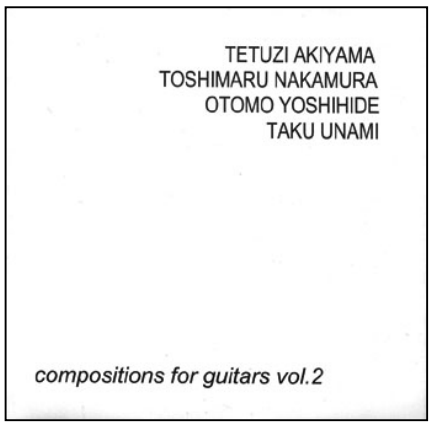
Then the seven perform a group improvisation to close the festival. All the stops are pulled out in this free-for-all, screeching amplifier and feedback noise-fest. Well, not really, but there is discernible a slight loosening of the joints after the previous disciplined exercise. A shade more feedback and crackling activity enters the arena, but the mixture of acoustic and electronic is made manifest and pure. There is, in fact, an awful lot of activity going on here, just very quietly, and it's pulling in different directions within an extremely open, balanved structure. Over 31 minutes, they appear to be writing the final paragraphs of a new musical Constitution. Want to join this new Republic? *Amplify 02* is the only passport you will need for citizenship.

ED PINSENT 14-16/11/2004
www.erstwhilerecords.com



See also the magazine and CD, *Improvised Music from Japan 2002-2003*, launch issue, IMJ-301. The Amplify festival is reviewed in some detail and Jon Abbey is interviewed.

SSSSHHHH...quiet improv



Tetuzi Akiyama / Toshimaru Nakamura / Otomo Yoshihide / Taku Unami

Compositions for Guitars Vol 2

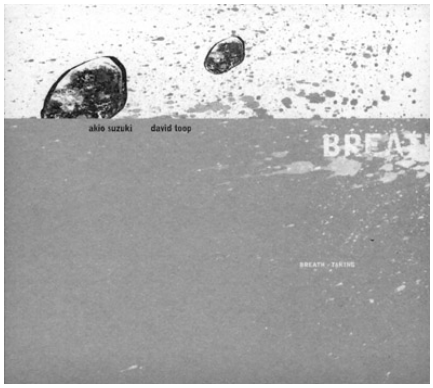
FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET 104 CD (2004)

Another A Bruit Secret compilation of topnotch Japanese music, following closely from and forming a not insignificant relationship with its sisters, the *Off Site Composed Music Series in 2001* double CD from 2002, and the 2003 set *Compositions for Guitars*. I mention the Off Site set as it impressed me muchly how, under influence of mighty Taku Sugimoto, these players were now branching out and dignifying their work with appellation 'composition'; and the 2003 guitar set, which included American and European players, but was likewise committed to whole-hearted re-exploration and re-invention of what a guitar could, or should, be. On the present disc, we have further evidence of a (not exclusively) Japanese project to deconstruct the 'familiarity' of a guitar – its sound, its method of playing, exploitation of possible accidents that occur when playing a guitar, its contextual history and mode of presentation even...and having deconstructed everything, attempting to rebuild guitar playing into intense statements entirely of their own devising. Possible to view this as some sort of modernist project to reclaim the guitar from the mainstream and reinscribe it into a completely avant-garde experimental context.

Toshimaru Nakamura turns in, of all things, a feedback piece. However, this time he does it with guitar amplifiers and pickups, and produces a much richer and resonant result than the sometimes rather attenuated whimpers that emerge from his trademark mixing-desk antics. A long trance-like hum ensues, that's so calm and still-centred that you wonder if artiste went off to pour self a cup of rice wine while music played on auto-pilot. On the contrary, 'gt flo #2' is a fully-realised artistic 'event', packed with amazing amount of tiny detail (if you can hear that deeply into the piece) with not a single arbitrary moment to disturb your appreciation of its vibrational depths. Tetuzi Akiyama overdubs two nylon string guitars on 'Moebius Rings', no doubt fully aware of place of said instrument in history of flamenco music and classical guitar work by Julian Bream or Narciso Yepes. Both of which are thrown into mental dustbin by Akiyama, who like Mr Freddy Feedback above succeeds in creating a palpable moment of utter tranquillity that totally defeats the Western mind. Another daring reinvention and reuse of classical instrument.

Otomo Yoshihide returns to his first instrument with two outstanding pieces. He was taught the guitar by Masayuki Takayanagi, the 1970s player and leader of collective combo New Directions who pretty much set the template for much free Japanese playing and whose complex legacy of work is still in process of being decoded today – according to Henry Kaiser, at least. Otomo's noisy guitar piece 'Plastics Pick and Mini-Motor' could be heard as some sort of experimenter's reinterpretation of history of late 1960s-early 1970s rock guitar exponents (Hendrix, Beck, Townsend, Clapton, Page et al), but it takes only a few moments of listening to realise how Otomo is refusing any notions of showoff / sexual prowess / blues influenced scales and his outstanding performative skills are able to take the 'notion' of a guitar solo into utterly new and stratospheric dimensions of untamed noise. The motor applied to the strings enables him to extend his imaginative reach; an unobtrusive tool that magnifies potential a thousand-fold. Otomo's other composition 'Softly, as in five guitars feedbacks' references, I think, the 2001 piece by Taku Sugimoto which was called simply 'hum'; with its gently purring amplifiers, 'played' by seven guitarists, already assuming proportions of a Fluxus composition. With five electric guitars likewise humming in unison, Otomo is not far from performing a Toshimaru feedback piece (in fact, Toshi is one of the players) and the whole deal with Taku connection does prompt questions of incestuousness. Nonetheless a maximal and enjoyable field of resonating harmonics pours from the speakers, showing the admirable discipline and taint control of feedback that only these players can manage, and creating a compelling hypnotic effect.

Taku Unami's 'The Whisperer In Darkness' takes its title – and it's the only title here that doesn't simply list the materials used to create it - from a story by H P Lovecraft, one of my favourite writers of insane, fervoured supernatural prose. At this point any narrative or other resemblance between Howard Philips and Taku ends. This duet between an acoustic guitar and a pedal steel is little more than a clutch of quietly-doodled notes, sliding up and down scales in seemingly random patterns, in amongst a huge field of tense silence. A bit baffling at 17 minutes, but if seen in line with modernist project, does reclaim pedal steel from a million corny country and western records and puts it into the recherché, little-heard zone of obscurity that is the Hibari Studio.



Apart from this one somewhat unsatisfying piece, this winning comp is a fine blend of feedback / noise / quiet improv and minimal performance, proposing highly non-specific, non-narrative, slowly unfolding tableaus of what I assume to be 'vertical' composition. Overall gentleness of tone disguises the violent massacre that's taking place as hundreds of years of guitar history are smashed – assuming that *is* the intention. Like the Off Site 2001 set it seems that the notion of composition here is that it should be (1) extremely simple and (2) 'instant' – ie no sooner played than composed. Idea of composition is thus inseparable from the tape recorder... and more importantly inseparable from the performer, and apart from the case where Otomo shares his compositional idea with other guitarists, the compositions here are sole property of the lone musician who's playing it. Not that this is a bad thing, but thought I'd mention it.

ED PINSENT 18/09/2004
www.abruitsecret.com

Akio Suzuki / David Toop

Breath-Taking

UNITED KINGDOM CONFRONT 14 CD (2004)

Japanese sound artist Akio Suzuki is builder and collector of home-made and found instruments, most of which display his strong connection to the sounds of the natural environment – his sculpture-instruments do little more than replicate, or enhance our perception of, the sounds of the wind, the

earth, the sky, water, grass rustling. I recall seeing him turn in a gentle and unassuming performance at Le Weekend festival in Stirling, and his quiet sounds are indeed impressive, reminding one of the grandeur of the world we live in. He is a perfect partner for UK polymath David Toop. He contributes to this his abiding interest in playing the Japanese flute, and a sympathetic meeting of minds results. They did it in London in the performance space of the Sound 323 record shop.

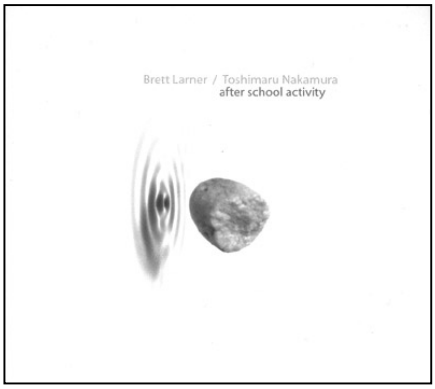
A single LP-length track delineates a quiet and ascetic episode. It starts with brittle percussive and rattling, perhaps using stones, and appears so dry and severe as to frighten off the faint-hearted. But when moaning flutes appear things begin to warm up, gradually. Some effort is required by listener; you may at least need to forget your hectic lifestyle and slow down metabolic rate and put self in suspended animation. *Breath-Taking* then does indeed allow one to enter zone of Zen-like contemplation to observe, with humility and gratitude, the simulacrum of nature which is growing around you in miniaturist way. Dry grass on hillock, whistle of wind, chirp of frog. For another approach to related theme (albeit neither quiet nor miniaturist), see Merzbow's *Frog*. Jeph Jerman and the Animist Orchestra have likewise used stones and ultra-quiet playing, but with an entirely different intention; Jerman's recorded statements appear almost diffuse compared with the intense concentration in evidence here.

Likewise I would suggest (given what little I know of Mr Toop and what I take to be his disenchantment with current super-abundance of 'minimal' music in the world) that *Breath-Taking* is a highly maximal piece, both players despite appearance of gentleness actually strong as bulls and capable of wrecking the arena with single throw of the horns, yet forcing all their energy through confines of a narrow pipe. What emerges is strong distilled music, carbonised and compressed, as hard a diamond dropped from mitt of Superman when squeezing lumps of coal, as he sometimes did to provide concrete evidence of his super-powers. In light of this, may be possible to read David Toop as Clark Kent making encounter with mysterious zen master Akio Suzuki.

ED PINSENT 21/09/2004
www.confront.info

Brett Larner / Toshimaru Nakamura
After school activity
AUSTRALIA IMPERMANENT RECORDINGS IRE005 CD (2003)

Here be three extremely discreet improvisations recorded by this duo in Oakland, California during January 2003. Well, if you want eventful' music, better go and buy something else; of all the quiet records reviewed this ish, this one's in line for the gold medal 'Il Silenzio' award. The usual Zen-like admonitions seem to come built in with this release; not so much sound for listening to for pleasure, as an agency which obliges



you to fully engage your body with the act of listening. It attempts to answer the age-old question, 'how can one, in any city, get away from the urban sounds without entering cut-off spaces?'

Brett Larner is a Canadian player who had 3 cuts on the massive 10 x CD box set *Improvised Music from Japan*; he's right there on disc 7 with his traditional koto and his not so traditional laptop computer. He studied the Japanese instrument with a veteran player, and now holds a master's license to play it; clearly it's taken about as seriously as being a Samurai warrior in Japan. With all that and his classical composition skills taken into account, Larner must cut an impressive figure in the musical world, and yet he still chooses to improvise for the most part, while exploring experimental tunings on the koto. Toshimaru should be well known to most of you by now, if not for his feedback work, then for the non-stop recording and mastering services he's been providing for many important releases.

Incredibly austere and full of unstated tension, this disc will either rivet you to the floor with rapt attention, or bore you to tears. The opening track 'your naif' comprises basic koto plucks occurring about once every two minutes, with a murmuring feedback tone sometimes appearing. Otherwise, silence. Virtually transparent as water. The word 'spare' doesn't even begin to describe it. The second track is so unobtrusive I couldn't even notice it enough to say anything about it. Where does that leave us?

The title track, however, has something more to get your teeth into. It was recorded on the 'Artship' in Oakland (an historical naval vessel moored at the Oakland Waterfront, since refurbished as a floating art gallery). Everything took place in the open air, and much ambient sound is captured in the finished recording. Just as well – the musicians aren't doing very much! Traffic, muted voices and planes passing overhead are discernible, including the arrival of enthusiastic schoolkids checking out the art (hence the title). But you have to remember this isn't a 'field recording'. It's an attempt to capture the 'live-ness' of the environment, 'whilst being a performance without audience'. At first, the performances of Larner and Nakamura are so non-interventionist that it's more like listening to the wind rattling against wind chimes on a bright spring day. Eventually, some playing does happen…when Larner gets warmed up, he gets into some serious action, weaving intricate patterns on his koto like a grasshopper jumping on a loom. Toshimaru, meanwhile, allows only the most washed-out and dissipated whistling to emerge from his languid devices. It's about 10% art in a huge field of natural sound.

ED PINSENT 10/10/2004
http://impermanent.info/recordings

Radu Malfatti / Mattin
Whitenoise for trombone and computer feedback
SPAIN W.M.O/R 07 CD (2003)

A primo example of ultra-minimal improvised playing – Malfatti on his trombone, and Mattin supplying computer feedback. On the first track, the discreet Malfatti barely appears on the near-inaudible recording of his trombone playing. Yet another example (viz Dörner, Rives and Bosettti) of a CD that presents the breath of the improviser as music. Perhaps we should invite all four of those players to special musical event, where they simultaneously breathe onto a picture window of plate-glass, 25 feet long and 10 feet high, on an extremely cold day. That way we can conduct a proper study of their breath, based on the condensation marks they leave behind. You may chortle, but I bet in five years from now a music festival in Switzerland or other cold climate will feature just such an action, if things go on the way they're heading…

Actually, this is a pretty good record of 'gas-jet' styled drones, starting and stopping, and creating interesting high and low sounds. I would guess that Malfatti's puffing is being computer-processed by Mattin, as it passes through the network of brass tubing. What could be more rewarding to a weary listener than a good gentle rumbling sound at the end of a hard day. In this kind of music, the silent gaps only sharpen your anticipation for the next barely-perceivable sound event. Eventually, this magnification of Malfatti's breath reaches the point where it becomes an entire environment, an intensive portrait of winds, waves, oceans.

The second track has a bit more in the way of sonic activity – one pictures 200 air conditioners, acting as passengers on a special jet airplane flying to a gusty region on a cloudy day. Even the engines of this jet are soft, made of foam rubber. What a breeze. Sometimes I think Francisco López has a lot to answer for…

ED PINSENT 01/11/2004
www.mattin.org

Fabrice Eglin and Jérôme Noetinger
Psychotic Reactions and Lightnin' Rag
FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET BLUE SERIES ABSBLUE01 CD (2004)

With a title like that, surely the innocent listener has every right to expect something worthy of the ears of writer and noise-rock

lover Lester Bangs (whose 'bible' of rock criticism this title references), crossed with the sounds of veteran bluesmen like Lightnin' Slim or Lightnin' Hopkins. But instead, it's more minimal improv…in this work, the subtle guitar inventions of Eglin meet up and interact with the tapework (and tape-recorder work) of Noetinger. We seem to have a live recording set-up in the comfort of home (Rives, France to be precise): there was a Revox A77 tape recorder, with loudspeakers; one electric guitar; one amplified acoustic guitar, plus a Walkman and contact mics. The guitars both seem to be treated in some way, possibly with preparations. Said set-up only awaits arrival of the keyed-up, enthused musicians; a recipe for amped-up six-stringed chaos and feedback, one might hope.

Unfortunately, it turns out to be a dreary hour spent in the boring company of these lugubrious fellows. They earnestly deliver slow, half-hearted plucks and gentle waves of feedback. The plucking activity gets slightly more agitated eventually, but doesn't relieve the half-baked qualities. There is a nice moment when and old bluegrass or early country song appears, presumably via the Walkman, reminding you of what real music sounds like. But it's brief. The second track of these three long untitled pieces has some vaguely interesting tape wobbles (one of Noetinger's specialities), along with a guitar that's detuned to the point of sounding positively ill. But despite such imaginative treatments, the actual performances remain aimless, meandering.

With its 'blue' cover and Lightin' references, I wondered if this was intended as some sort of ironic 'deconstruction' of blues-based rock music, laying the history of the guitar in its coffin, much as the Japanese players attempt on the recent *Compositions* series CD. But it's probably just a coincidence, as this release seems to be part of this label's 'Blue' series. A. Bosetti contributes a painted diagram which attempts to assist by explaining what's going on in diagrammatic form. I'm still not inspired however. Oh, for Derek Bailey who did this with a very similar set-up at the ICA in the 1970s, documented on the *Domestic and Public Pieces* LP, and much more convincingly too…

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004
www.abruitsecret.com

Ferran Fages / Ruth Barberán / Alfredo Costa Monteiro

Atolón

ITALY ROSSBIN RECORDS RS017 CD (2004)

Ferran Fages and Alfredo Costa Monteiro usually play together as Cremaster, in which guise they have unleashed nine kinds of digital ear-punishment in recent years; here, they're joined by trumpeter Ruth Barberán, forming a trio devoted to quietish-improv and an unusual instance where the Cremaster guys forsake their digital tools, their mixing desk and their studio, for something entirely acoustic. Here, they apply the same severe and austere ground rules that shape their electronica output, and apply a radical rethinking of what it means to play an instrument.

Ferran Fages, for example, plays the 'acoustic turntable', which I take to mean that he doesn't plug it in or allow any electrical contact between cartridge, tone arm and record, or indeed put any records on the deck to begin with. Instead, he lets the rotating deck (perhaps powered by his own hands?) to create such swishing and grinding noises as it may. Monteiro picks up the accordion, and refuses to play notes, chords, or anything resembling a polka; instead, treats it as a pleated box for the production of sighs, gasps, empty drones and wheezes. Barberán's approach to her trumpet is equally unconventional; on the second track, her tonguing and close-lipped technique makes a noise more like a tiny outboard motor on a plastic speedboat model. In fine, all acoustic playing and total refusal of normality in sounds made; the variety they're able to generate gives digital funsters a poke in the eye. Additionally, unlike some quiet /reduced improv records, there is something going on continuously; no huge gaps of silence for these busy Spaniards.

Full marks for innovative frame of mind. Only trouble is it's not very interesting, engaging or enjoyable to listen to. True, the initial moments suggest a very 'different' sort of record and promise much hope; but this wears off quickly, as the overall gritty-grindy nature of the sounds becomes rather inert and monotonous. And do the players need such a solemn caste of mind while they're doing this? Not a smile cracked anywhere on this record; fun-factor involved in creating quiet improv must be pretty low, on this evidence. As usual, listener should of course try to push past this 'pain barrier' of tedium. While doing so, peruse the four title for this work which are further examples of word-mangling for my collection: 'weiur', 'uyoti', '982yr' and 'weidfug', all file save-names from Hell…the four tracks were improvised in the studio in 2003 in Barcelona.

ED PINSENT 24/10/2004
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USA SIWA #12/13 2 x VINYL LP [2004]

A grand double LP set, of which the first record is the 'artistic and sensitive' one, and the second contains the 'punk rock' set…nmperign are Americans Greg Kelley and Bhob Rainey, presumably kitted out with their familiar instruments of trumpet and live electronics, although no credits or explanations are offered. The first two sides have the long title and document a performance recorded in France; it's a set of very vivid and crisp droning and breathing recordings. Also metallic barks and grunts. Think of a dialogue between two susurrating alien monsters, like the Ice Warriors. Then multiply it by ten. Although the performance is mostly one of controlled passion, a sustained sojourn in the realms of quiet mystery, by side two it's livening up considerably – the very bells of the instrument(s) are ringing with the vibrational methods of the players. Towards the end of the side there's slightly more attack to the playing; agitated warbling and high-pitched squeals appear. The sound of air and breathing also becomes ever more prominent, whistling shushy noises and gasping, phlegm-ridden wheezes. Think of a couple of blue-collar guys, who have the enviable task of inflating the floats for Macy's Parade. One day they're feeling so gung-ho they decide to turn off the inflation machine, and do it using their own lungs. Eventually, a gigantic rubber mass inflated with air results. But the two guys are writhing on the floor with blue faces, and what's more the float doesn't even take off, because that requires helium.

Sides 3 and 4 comprise 'I am sitting in a fucking room', a hilarious title for a much edgier and weird set recorded at Wesleyan University. Whether the same acoustical playback experiment of Alvin Lucier's is repeated here is anyone's guess, but it certainly uses amplification in some way. I'm not sure but it could involve live electronics or tape manipulation of some sort. Juddering, wobbly brass sounds blast their way onward against the quiet background grinding of an industrial landscape. The horn sounds like its having its innards torn out, like a mashed fox torn to pieces by the hounds; it bellows a treated noise that's as rich as guitar feedback. This one is a truly amazing soundscape and improvised performance work, an excellent collection of distressed and mournful droneage. The title clearly demonstrates the exasperation and sense of claustrophobia these two guys feel, perhaps with the whole stupid avant-garde scene as it currently stands. It might be the sort of ejaculation made by two crass, ignorant frat-boys when they accidentally stumble into an evening of 'modern' music at the campus auditorium: *Avant music? Man, that sucks! I'll give you sitting in a fucking room…* A sumptuous double LP package in a silk-screen printed sleeve, as is customary with all SIWA releases. Deserves a place on your shelf.

ED PINSENT 03/11/2004
www.siwarecords.com

Reinhold Freidl / Bernhard Günter / Michael Vorfeld

Message Urgent

GERMANY TRENTE OISEAUX TOC042 CD (2004)

My introduction to the London free improv scene came courtesy of an AMM concert back in October 1999. From the other side of the world I'd heard their name whispered

fervently by wild-eyed men who roamed the streets, uncaring as to where their destination lay. When I did finally get to hear them it was like an induction rite into some secret cult; the world outside was suddenly very different to that which I had previously imagined. I realized that I had been living in a delusory state up until that time and that now I could say along with Sartre, 'I exist!'

All this is to say that any mention of a minimal, free improvising trio that is comprised of piano, percussion and something resembling electric guitar is likely to get me thinking of only one group of people. To be fair the role of Keith Rowe here is played by label head Günter on some strange beast called a cellotar, which one can easily imagine is the illicit offspring of Rowe's axe and Mark Wastell's cello. Also, Vorfeld doubles on percussion and what is mysteriously described as 'stringed instruments'. This album was recorded live at the PODEWIL in Berlin at the end of 2003. I have no idea what the PODEWIL is; I like to imagine it stands for Pagans Of Doom Educate With Instruments Loudly.

Actually I confess all, for this is no regular trio, the likes of which hopes to aspire to the lofty heights of AMM. Freidl and Vorfeld apparently comprise a regularly performing duo that Günter decided to join for this special occasion. But then again, even the mighty AMM has had a changing lineup over the years, and on this CD these three do seem to have firmly fixed their sights on those Elysian fields of free improv guarded over by the trio from Albion. What lies in store then is probably not that much of surprise for the initiated, and may even be ever so slightly disappointing.

The album's four tracks that comprise the better part of an hour somewhat perversely resemble a giant jazz head. By far the most predominant noises on the first, second and fourth tracks are those of bowing and scraping, with the third track being really the only one in which we here any semblance of discrete elements. This is in fact the main criticism of the album: that it lacks any real degree of variety. It is all well and good to scrape away and bow various examples of percussion and strings; such noises are part of the standard repertoire of European free improv. But when these noises make up most of the CD you do start to think you've heard it all before.

In and of itself it isn't a bad album. Günter obviously has an eye (and an ear!) for production values and I'm sure that he wouldn't release something if it weren't up to his fairly exacting standard. It's just that I don't think there is a single sound wave here that I haven't heard performed in London over the last few years. The CD does a decent job of representing a particular type of improvisational playing, but it doesn't stand out amongst the crowd of releases that seem to be produced nowadays by the free improv scene, many of which it must be said are guilty of the same faults.

It is a little strange for an album that is entitled *Message Urgent*, that it is not until the final track that there appears to be any audible urgency to proceedings. Much of the rest seems to a long preamble by the three Germans. Their ubiquitous bowing finally works up a head of steam, at least for the first five minutes or so before settling down again to a period of doodling, the bows come out for a final flurry. It all fades out nicely with German precision, presumably before the applause has a chance to ruin the whole aesthetic.

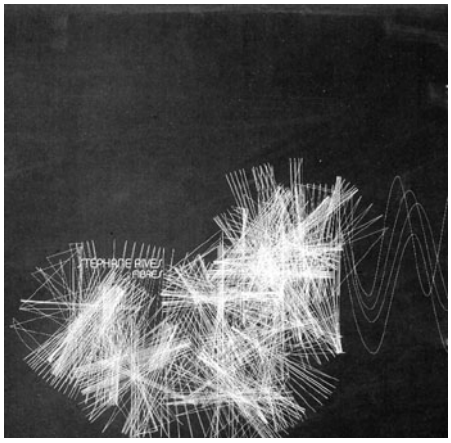
AARON ROBERTSON
Firmungsstr. 27, 56068 Koblenz, Germany
info@trenteoiseaux.com
www.trenteoiseaux.com

Stéphane Rives
Fibres
FRANCE POTLATCH P303 CD (2003)

From France, here comes one man with his soprano saxophone and seven recordings made in July 2003. He says he 'considers his saxophone as an organic instrument equipped with filters altering sound waves coming from breath'. Modern improvisation endeavours to make us aware of things we once took for granted. Accordingly, and as is customary nowadays with records of wind instruments, the sound of the sax just isn't enough; you also have to hear the breath of the player, puffing away and amplified by the metal tubing of the instrument. Both Axel Dörner and Greg Kelley will aver, or testify, to this. The breath of Stéphane Rives is ragged, hairy, and filled with the juices of tobacco-stained saliva, as befits a Gauloise-smoking Frenchman. The musical notes that emerge in between bouts of breathing are tortured, high-pitched whines. A good puffy effort; in all it's a bit like witnessing the slow death of a 10-foot long python.

ED PINSENT 13/10/2004
www.potlatch.fr

Xavier Charles
La Neige Attend La Neige
FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET 10 3" CD (2003)



An unusual semi-improvised, semi-composed short work. Xavier plays 'surfaces vibrantes' on this mini-disc, in which 'various objects that have been chosen for their resonance capacity are arranged, added to or subtracted from the vibrations of the loudspeakers'. His action produces a sound akin to taking a ride on an old milk float where you can hear the bottles rattling around in the crates, or perhaps the sound of an autoclave in the laboratory heating up lots of glass retorts filed with chemicals. The basic compositional structure is fairly simple: the occurrence of each sound event is alternated with a brief passage of silence, and then when the sound returns, another new sonic element has been added to it. Like for instance, the first reappearance is joined by a vague pounding noise. It's like a guy re-entering the room wearing another suit on top of his first one. In this way it builds up to a fairly dense piece; it's got a pretty funky rhythm, considering it's from the intellectual art-music school, and the regular use of silence certainly keeps your expectation level high. A burbly droney pleasing noise from this CCAM Vand'Oeuvre-associated fellow, all done in acoustic mode and quite refreshing in tone.

Charles is a militant activist; he considers his vibrational work as something of a 'radical gesture', because it has something to do with re-use of domestic objects and opening up new possibilities for inanimate things. Very poetical, very philosophical. 'Snow Waits for Snow', as it translates, also appears to be something of a philosophical riddle, in the Bernhard Günter vein, for listener to ponder as they wait for the next little episode to appear. He's also into the idea of using the loudspeaker as an instrument, which isn't so new, but he does it so cutely who can resist? Shake it boys…I guess you should never invite Xavier to host a cocktail party however, since he'd be rattling the cocktail shaker about all evening and you'd never get a single Manhattan poured, but then your guests might enjoy his groovy Latin rhythms and start leaping about like apes. You could calm them down by playing the Courtis/Marhaug record (see elsewhere).

ED PINSENT 28/10/2004
www.abruitsecret.com

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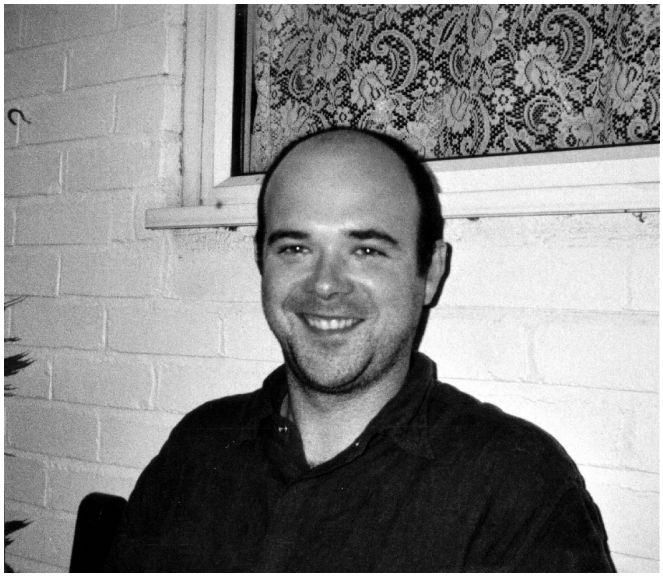
Rhodri Davies



Location: His London home
Date: 08 June 2004
EP = Ed Pinsent
RD = Rhodri Davies

EP It might help me to understand what you're doing with the harp, if I knew more about the instrument. Can you explain it to me? Because it strikes me you're doing some quite amazing radical things to the sound of the harp.

RD Yes. It has similar attributes to the guitar and the piano, both those instruments, in so much as they've all got a resonating chamber and strings. The biggest difference lies in how each instrument facilitates accidentals (the sharps, naturals and flats). I improvise on two types of harp systems, the double action pedal harp, which you find in an orchestra and a small Celtic or lever harp. The pedal harp has a pedal for each of the seven notes in a scale, and each pedal has a flat, natural and sharp setting. The Celtic harp has levers which you change manually, a semitone at a time. With the piano all the notes are in front of you. But to access certain notes on the harp, you have to use your feet. Which makes playing quick chromatic changes – playing be-bop or something – very difficult, because you have to pedal like mad. Playing modally lends itself to the harp, because I set the pedals and – I'm off! It also differs to the piano, because I'm actually in direct contact with the strings. As I'm physically plucking the strings, there is a different quality of attack to the felt hammer of a piano. The strings are also different on the harp; they are made of wire, gut and nylon. And the tension isn't as great as on the grand piano. So the quality of the sound is different. The only thing I've changed from the intrinsic harp, is to experiment with different strings – first with violin and cello strings and now I use thick wire-strung guitar strings. They are more responsive to ebows and have a particular bright sound, which I don't get from a gut harp string. On top of this I use preparations and extended techniques on the instrument. So I don't know if that helps!

EP Yes, I'm getting the hang of it now...that recorded piece, 'Perdereau' you just played seemed to be very much focused on the sounding-board? It seemed to comprise resonating sounds which normally, I suppose, you wouldn't be able to hear in a concert situation. At least, not in that level of detail.

RD Yes. The piece is dedicated to Jacques Perdereau who died this year, he was an anarchist broadcaster with the Parisian radio station 'Radio Libertaire'. I first met him in 1998 when I first played in France and he was a warm and intelligent man. The idea for the piece was to play as many strings as possible at the same time and record the resulting sounds inside the soundboard. The aim was to generate as much 'beating' effect as possible, through tuning the strings microtonally and pedal settings. The chords at the beginning explore length of decay, some of the bass string resonance can last up to 2 minutes, and the ebow section at the end deals with sustain. I've had a fascination with the sounds inside the resonating chamber of the harp, ever since I was a child. I used to play notes and listen to what would happen to the sound continuing inside the box, which, if I wasn't pressing my ear to the sound board, like you heard earlier, you wouldn't really pick up on! When I play with an

orchestra, and we're tuning up before the performance, I'm usually competing with the tympanies and basses who are trying to tune up at the same time! The only way I can tune is by pressing my ear against the soundboard to hear the notes. So I've had this connection with the sound inside the harp for a long time. And also I became aware that when I'm playing quieter material on the harp, maybe I'm in the best seat in the room to hear these sounds. So I've got this interest in amplifying the very quiet sounds that somebody at the back of the room can't hear necessarily. And that's another thing I'm interested in, is how to get away from a recording as a *document*, and to improvise with the recording technique itself. To place the mics in different positions inside the harp, instead of the same old way…

EP Yes, making a record as a statement rather than a document...It wasn't the Incus label itself, but a person associated with it – Martin Davidson – who was quite insistent on recording music as it was played. Not having any kind of interference with it. I'm less of a purist, I suppose...I'm certainly excited by the possibilities of the recording studio and the recording medium. And there are quite a few improvisers who have gone along with this...a recent example is that Derek Bailey CD with Franz Hautzinger. It's Bailey's guitar with Franz on the trumpet, and extensive post-production in terms of editing, selecting the best bits...and the same with Michael Renkel of course...and *Pure Water Construction* [by Martin Archer and Simon Fell], you were part of that one.

RD Oh yes. It was through Simon Fell that that happened, because he had been working with Martin in the past. They invited a handful of musicians to contribute solo recordings, and they would manipulate and add instrumentation to these pieces, from what I remember. Seems a long time ago now. Actually, I was recording for him two weeks ago on another project. Mostly playing notation. Simon was playing also, and I think he used some of Ingar Zachs' percussion material on it. I'm interested to see how it'll turn out.

EP So you didn't have any objections to this kind of post-production treatment?

RD At the time I was just very exited to be on a CD, actually. Because it was one of the first ones I'd done and certainly the first one I'd been invited to contribute to. No, I've never had any objections to that. It does depend on who is manipulating my sound and in what context. Recently, I got very excited working with Jean Pallandre, who has these fantastic microphones and a creative approach to recording. Xavier Charles, Angharad Davies and I were dotted around in some woods in north London....with all these passers-by looking at us strangely! And Jean would walk around with his mics. The quality and detail of his recording was incredible. It was an interesting process to play in that environment I had to play completely differently in relation to the sounds around me.

EP Before *Pure Water Construction*, there's this 1997 record of IST, with Simon Fell and Mark Wastell. *Anagrams to Avoid*...

RD That was the very first thing I'd recorded, and it was the very first meeting with Mark and Simon as a trio. The trio formed in 1995 when I moved down to London. I'd been playing with Simon privately in Huddersfield, and Simon had been playing with Mark, and when I came down to London he thought he'd bring us together. That record was very exciting at the time.

EP There's another IST record, but I can't remember what it is...

RD Ghost Notes, on Simon's Bruce's Fingers label. And also there's an early cassette release on Mark's label, Confront, which was called *Consequences of Time and Place*. That was a gig in the Priory Arms. There's a new IST recording coming out soon of a concert we did in a hexagonal church in Italy at the Contemporaneamente 2002 contemporary classical festival. It was just this incredible space. The sound was reverberating around, and bouncing in different directions. Peter Kowald was also playing solo at the festival and it turned out to be one of his last gigs.

EP It's surprising how well that works in IST, the combination of the different strings. You have the full range of what strings can do in terms of plucking, bowing and resonating...bass notes...

RD Yes, the three instruments share much of the same range. It's funny, with a lot of that potential, that at first a lot of our material was very high-pitched!

EP IST were going to do a tour of the UK in 1998, playing composed pieces by Earle Brown, Stockhausen...did that happen?

RD Yes. It was an Arts Council of England improvised music scheme tour. By the time we had done five concerts, travelled and crashed in a couple of dodgy bed and breakfasts, we were left with...a little less than we started with! It was the only way we could do a small tour. Jazz Services are doing a similar scheme now and for some reason improvised music comes under the 'Jazz' banner.

EP I think Simon Fell's quite good, isn't he, about finding out these sources of funding, and making the most of them.

RD Yes, often wading through endless forms is the only way to make things happen. Especially with his larger projects, like *Compilation* they are impossible to realise without some financial assistance.

EP Did you ever play on any of those?

RD Yes, *Compilation III*. It included an IST improvisation, some solo harp notation and a quartet with Orphy Robinson, Simon Fell, Mark Sanders and myself.

EP The next thing I want to know about is Chris Burn's Ensemble. A fantastic improvising group...how long did you work with that combo?

RD I was invited to play in 1997 on the *Navigations CD* along with Axel Dörner and Mark Wastell. And I was a member until last year.

EP Chris Burn is still going, but is the Ensemble still a concern?

RD The Ensemble has gone though many stages...and at the moment Chris and John Butcher are the core members. I don't know what the situation is at the moment, but I think there is a project with Viennese musicians next year, which seems a good way forward.

EP Does he compose, or direct in some way, to shape the pieces?

RD Some pieces are orchestrational, they were fairly straightforward structures with specified duration. He would not dictate how or what to improvise, only who should play with who. Richard Barrett wrote a piece for us called Codex for the Bangor New Music Festival, which was very well written. It was great joining Chris Burn's Ensemble, because I learned a lot about playing in a larger ensemble, and retaining or finding my voice within a larger ensemble. I learned a lot from Chris's playing directly, because it was really relevant to the harp. John Butcher and Phil Durrant were a big influence as well.

EP Does that approach go against the grain of what a hard-core improvisor would advocate? I mean insisting on 'pure' improvisation without any planning?

RD I guess I've been aware of the importance of improvisation in composed music. It's a vital ingredient, and likewise, there are compositional elements that are present within an improvisation at any one time. For example the language I have developed over the years, memory, the history that builds up from playing with other people, of playing similar material but in different spaces, in different contexts, and with different people. These elements are not necessarily conscious and don't happen in an obvious or pre-determined way.

EP The tape piece you just played back there, to me that *was* a composition. It's partly pre-determined by the fact you have four pairs of hands playing the harp, and picking out chords you had written down, and then deliberately treating the recording so that you cut off the attack...and then structuring it so that you could use the e-bows playing it as well. It's a simple composition, but there's shape to it.

RD I was trying to keep that process as improvisatory as possible, but also within the framework of it being semi-composed.

EP The players at Off Site in Tokyo, they did a whole double CD set which they called *Compositions from Off Site.* Which again were just very simple instructional pieces, but resulting in work which to my mind was much more interestingly-shaped, in a very minimal way...even when it's just five people playing guitar amplifiers!

RD I've not heard that CD. Though I'm attracted to musicians on that recording. I loved Taku Sugimoto's 'Opposite' CD and was interested in what he did after that

period of his work in his determination to not replicate that music again. I was drawn to how he stripped down and isolated his sounds within silence. We played one of his compositions 'Dotted Music' which specified to create between 1 and 4 very short sounds within a specific duration of time. The result was quite gestural in a way, which surprised me. We recorded it in Japan and also performed it in Norwich, as part of Graham Halliwell's series of concerts.

EP We've got this record with John Bisset, the guitarist...*Malthouse*. Very interesting, it's like you're edging towards making this solo record, bit by bit! Moving away from playing in combos. *Malthouse* was very successful, I think. This was when I first noticed these extraordinary radical things you're doing to the harp.

RD That recording came about because John had been saying for ages he needed a holiday. I was going back to Aberystwyth so I invited him to join me. We brought our instruments with us and booked the recording studio, which was the beautiful building you see on the cover of the CD. It was pretty ramshackle and there were no toilets. Because we'd got away from London and the improv scene, and we were on holiday, it had a certain sort of playfulness to it, which was slightly different from the more austere improv that was around at the time. While we were recording the guy who owned the recording studio, ran in at one point and wiped out half of our material! I think he did it on purpose! I don't know why, he was a strange guy. So we only had 50 minutes to choose from in the end. The technician who was recording us was great however. *Malthouse* kick-started John's 'Home' Series, where he goes to people's home towns to record. He's been to Burkhard Beins's and Alex Ward's home and recently went to his own hometown of Stockport to record *Smithy*, which is very beautiful and very

John! He also keeps to the layout of the *Malthouse* CD, with an old photo of the place where they recorded...

EP It's an old photo of the Malthouse, isn't it? But it's still the same place...

RD Exactly the same, and it looks the same as it did 100 years ago. The photo was taken by John Challinor and I found it at the National Library of Wales. I think it was taken in the19th century. Originally it was a Malthouse but by the time the photo was taken it was being used as the Aberystwyth Social Service centre.

EP Were you using crocodile clips and stuff, on the strings, by this point?

RD Yes. There was a point in the recording where John started throwing his preparations at my harp! And I got really worried, because the soundboard is very delicate, so I ended up standing in front of the harp, fielding these things, trying to stop him throwing them at my harp! That made it onto the CD.

EP Was this the first time you'd prepared the harp?

RD No, I'd prepared it on *Anagrams To Avoid*, and I guess I was drawn to using preparations after hearing Simon Fell play for the first time. And of course Chris Burn and John Cage's prepared piano was a big influence.

EP Do you intend to set the harp free from preconceptions, which the listener might have about the instrument? The associations I have...sometimes one thinks of the harp as a kind of 'stuffy' instrument, in 19th century parlours. And, dare I say it, something associated with 'Welsh heritage'. Is it in your mind to do something about this, to reclaim the harp?

RD Definitely. When I started, I was very conscious of breaking down these stereotypes of romantic pieces and Welsh folk tunes. I'd always had an inkling that it had more potential for exploration. I see *Trem* as a response to all that. It was a response to the harp world: the stifling competitive arena that I was in, and to all those values that were inflicted on me from a very young age. In retrospect *Trem* is a *modernist* record, in the way that it is very much a reaction against certain traditions and fuelled by a desire to create something new. It was good to get that out of my system. After that, I became more interested in reacting against improvisation itself. And asking myself, where do I go next?

EP So, this is because you've been playing the harp since childhood?

RD I've been playing the harp for 25 years now, since I was seven. As a freelance musician, I am still called on to play a lot of classical and romantic music. So it's still difficult to escape. Sometimes, however, interesting pieces do appear. At the moment I'm practicing Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*, which is a great piece! I'm playing it at Aldeburgh Music Festival next week. And there are a handful of pieces I like playing, Mahler 10 for instance is good to perform, there's a good harp part which is lush...I don't mind so much playing the odd composition like that. And the contemporary music repertoire that I play with Apartment House of course is very good.

EP Does the harp always tend to be used in the same 'lush' way in orchestras? Or are there composers who have tried to do something different with it?

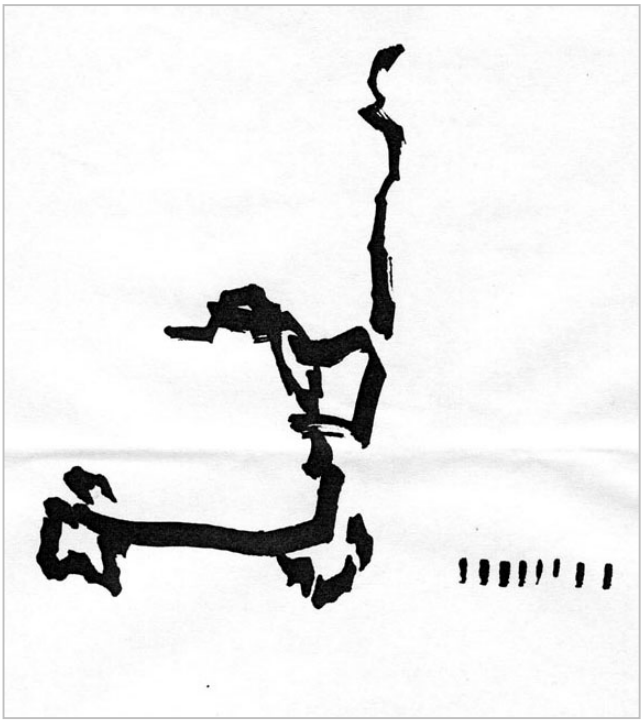
RD I was playing in Bartok's *Concerto for Orchestra* recently. This piece includes a percussive technique where you attack the strings with two metal or wooden rods. Then there are the Italian 20th century composers, Berio, Petrassi and Donatoni who were writing differently for the harp. In the 1960s Bussotti composed *Fragmentations* which employed graphic scores, and instructed the performer to play two harps. One was tuned in microtones. This piece was very influential when I started improvising... *Fragmentations* was written the year before *Sequenza 2*, and I find *Fragmentations* a far more radical work than Berio's *Sequenza*, although *Sequenza* has got the kudos. It is a far more challenging and interesting piece, but it is rarely performed. I've recently been commissioning new harp works by English Experimental composers such as Michael Parsons and John White. Also pieces by younger composers who have drawn inspiration from them such as Laurence Crane, John Lely and James Saunders.

EP Maybe we should get to Mark Wastell. He has a very high regard for you. When I spoke to him a couple of years ago, he does seem to see himself as something of a pioneer in the UK of what has been labelled 'quiet improvisation'. He thinks he got there before the Japanese, which is interesting. But he does count you as his closest musical partner.

RD Absolutely. We are very close. He is the musician I have the longest relationship and we have mirrored each other's developments in many respects. Next year will be our tenth year of playing together. We have many projects planned, to release a recording of our duo version of Broken Consort and tour England with Burkhard Beins in The Sealed Knot.

Regarding reductionism I'm not really interested in who came first. For sure, Phil Durrant was an influence on both of us. He was the first musician I was playing with who was dissatisfied with a 'busy' approach to improvising, and also Robin Hayward. This was partly due to their work with Radu Malfatti. Phil Durrant was also very much into Morton Feldman at the time, and that was a definite influence on his violin playing and on us. The CD *Beinhaltung* on Fringes with Thomas Lehn, Radu Malfatti and Phil Durrant was a recoding that captured what I was interested in at that time and was very influential. *Beinhaltung* was far more interesting to us at the time than the *Dach* CD that followed it. By the time *Dach* came we felt the music had lost it's edge. And going to Berlin and playing with Burkhard Beins, Annette Krebbs, Andrea Neuman, Axel Dorner and Michael Renkel, and their approach to improvising was great. So there was a loosely connected group of us that were trying to look into these different areas.

EP And Mark Wastell was also interested in minimal electronica side of things, such as Marc Behrens. Are you keen on that area as well?



RD Very much so. I listen to Behrens, Chartier and López, and other areas as well like Chris Watson, Toshiya Tsunoda and Eliane Radigue. There's an interesting sound artist in Manchester called Lee Patterson. He has a beautiful CD called *Heatworks* where he puts contact mics on sparklers and creates a great sound. We're planning on working together next year.

EP I think Mark's Confront label also adds a kind of interesting aesthetic to the whole thing, including the packaging. I assume this is something you're happy to align yourself with...?

RD Yes, Mark's always had a very clear aesthetic regarding his Confront label, even when he was making cassettes. There were five cassette releases before the CDs. Then we released Assumed Possibilities as a CD-R. I guess the first 'proper' CDs we made were *Trem* and *Foldings*. And then it went legit, as it were. At the time, making tapes and CD-Rs were the only viable options for us. But yes, it still had a very distinct sort of image and aesthetic, which has carried on through to its present form. Damien Beaton is Confront's designer, and he puts a lot of thought into the feel of the card and the minutiae of the design.

EP And the *Still Point* record, that was quite an achievement. Was that a studio record?

RD That was at Gateway Studios, and had a couple of semi-composed pieces on it. My composition was 'Still Point' and Mark's was for toy piano and string trio. I guess both Mark and I had been interested in experimenting with compositional elements. We'd started writing little semi-composed pieces, with structures, or graphic scores, for our ensembles. The group Assumed Possibilities came about when Mark and I wanted to form an acoustic quartet. We chose one member each, and invited Chris Burn and Phil Durrant to join.

EP What comes over on the record is the intensity of it, more than anything...in spite of the silence, there seems to be a power of some sort, emanating from what you're playing...what kind of a state do you have to bring yourselves to, to play that?

RD I think it's just that we were very focused. Playing in a more reduced context demanded a lot of attention. I couldn't hide behind anything and I was very exposed. If I played something that was inappropriate, it was very obvious. So it kept me on my toes. It demanded a different way of playing, instead of relying on energy and propulsion. I really enjoyed that period.

EP When playing live this way, are you able to command the audience's interest and respect?

RD That does tend to split audiences, really. You either get the response – wow, it's incredible, you really drew us in, we were straining to hear things; or you get – what a complete waste of time! Couldn't hear a thing! It depends how open or interested certain people are in actually hearing it. There are occasions when I'm playing in a large hall, where I'd rather have a microphone that boosts the sound a little bit. So the level is still quite low, but you can hear the detail. I was never interested in just playing as quietly as possible, so that people couldn't distinguish what I'm playing. I just think that was a fairly perverse aspect of it. This is not to say that a lot of perverse things cannot be enjoyable! But I was more interested in the silence framing the sound, and when to play, and when not to play, and what not to play.

EP Does it affect the performance, if the audience are just [not paying attention]?

RD It can be very distracting, yeah. It does help if I feel that the audience are there with me. If it's not working, and I think the audience doesn't like it, then it's really painful! Maybe when I'm playing louder music, it is easier to ignore the audience, because I'm caught up in the sound. I do see a slight sea change in the audiences at the moment. There tends to be a lot of interest in new music and the audiences seem to be younger and less drawn from one area of music. I was in Berlin recently at a club called Ausland - Andrea Neumann and Andrea Ermke were playing, and it was packed! The audience was very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the music. I suppose improvised music has a history of over 60 years by now...it seems to be slightly different from when I started, when there would be one person in the audience! When I came down to London, it seemed to me a lot of the energy was negative, and tired and worn-out among the musicians...and the audiences were depleted. That was the general feeling I had, and not just in England, in Germany as well. I think electronic music is largely what's responsible for this renewed interest, and that's taking improv into different spheres. It's not just stuck in a free improvisation ghetto.

EP What about Company Week? Did you ever play there?

RD Derek Bailey largely stopped organising Companies for a time and then it resurfaced. I was invited to play at an event organised by Derek called Cavanoconnor at The Vortex, London which was a sort of Company event. Then I

played at a Company in Marseilles, and Company in New York. I guess New York was one of the most energised. It was with IST, Will Gaines and some downtown musicians. We got a very enthusiastic response...whooping and cheering, which was very bizarre for us coming from London!

EP Would you say that you have an interior landscape, that you're trying to explore through music?

RD Erm...no! I've never seen myself on an inner journey, or trying to find out more about myself. Sometimes, I think I'm doing certain things, and then in retrospect I realise I was doing something completely different. Certain elements of who I am come through regardless, so that there might appear to be some continual thread, which I can't escape. Much of the time I'm dealing with sound in a space. How the sound begins, its duration, decay, volume and its quality. I'm interested in finding ways of playing that are not governed by obvious interaction, gesture or energy. I'm also exploring how a sound relates to a space, fellow musician or the audience.

EP One other thing – Welshness. It crops up now and again, when you translate titles into the Welsh language...was there any kind of agenda that you may have?

RD When I grew up I was singing and playing the drums in Welsh language bands. For me singing in Welsh was a political statement. I grew up in a bilingual environment, but where Welsh was not recognised in the public domain on an equal footing. It's a hangover from that, I suppose. Presenting the two languages side by side on a record is a natural thing for me as that was the reality for me growing up.

EP The Cranc CD of course, has a trilingual package...

RD Yes, meeting up with Nikos Veliotis was great. His solo release *Radial* on Confront is very beautiful. Cranc has changed a lot from our first CD and I guess we're more in a droney area at the moment. We've been trying to record Cranc for ages, but for logistical and technical reasons...it was pretty difficult to get together. We hope to release a CD next year. Cranc is a group that I'm really fond of.

EP What are your upcoming releases?

RD My piece 'Perdereau' will appear on the *London Strings* project on Absinth. Then there's the IST release, which was supposed to come out on Rossbin but will come out on another label now. There is a Sealed Knot release on Confront called *Unwanted Object*. Mark and I will bring out a duo recording to mark our ten-year association next year. And I'm about to start hosting house concerts. Finding venues in London is very expensive. The cheapest places we can find are churches and I would like to get away from those associations. I was playing in Berlin recently and Annette Krebs invited me to play a solo in her house. And it just worked really well. The performer is very close to the audience. It's very relaxed and gets away from concert formalities. And with it being my own home, I don't have to travel anywhere! Sean Meehan will be playing the first one, then Taku Unami and Burkhard Beins and I hope to invite Annette Krebbs and Andrea Neumann when they are in town.

EP Are you quite sanguine about the future of improvised music?

RD Well, I've just come through a phase of being completely bored. Bored with my own music, and what I was playing. I found it too predictable. Now, however, I'm in a more positive mood. I've started amplifying the quiet sounds inside the body of the instrument, which has opened up a whole new world. It seems that a lot of musicians have moved on from reductionism and are exploring different areas. But of course things will change, they always do. □

Some Records...many have been reviewed in back issues of The Sound Projector.

IST, *Anagrams to Avoid*
USA SIWA Records SIWA #3 LP (1997)
With Simon H Fell and Mark Wastell.

Various Artists, *Pure Water Construction*
UNITED KINGDOM DISCUS 11CD (1998)
Cut-ups by Simon Fell and Martin Archer.

Chris Burn's Ensemble, *Navigations*
UNITED KINGDOM ACTA RECORDS ACTA 12 (1998)

Rhodri Davies / John Bisset, *Malthouse*
2:13 MUSIC 2:13CD010 CD (1999)

IST, *Ghost Notes*
UNITED KINGDOM BRUCE'S FINGERS BF 28 CD (1999)
With Simon H Fell and Mark Wastell.

Cranc, *All Angels*
GREECE EDO E-007 CD (2000)
With Angharad Davies on violin and Nikos Veliotis on cello.

Various Artists, *Relay Eight*
UNITED KINGDOM 2:13 MUSIC 2:13CD011 CD (2001)

The Sealed Knot, *Surface / Plane*
USA MENISCUS RECORDS MNSCS 012 CD [2001]
With Mark Wastell (violoncello) and Burkhard Beins (percussion)

Assumed Possibilities, *Still Point*
ITALY ROSSBIN RS007 CD (2002)
With Chris Burn, Mark Wastell and Phil Durrant.

Chris Burn's Ensemble, *Ensemble at Musica Genera 2002*
POLAND MOO MUSIC MM 03006 CD (2002)
With Burn, John Butcher, Xavier Charles, Matt Hutchinson and Nikos Veliotis.

Rhodri Davies, *Trem*
UNITED KINGDOM CONFRONT 11 CD [2002]
First harp solo CD!

Various Artists, *Life is OK*
UNITED KINGDOM MY GIANT MUM RECORDING MGM-002 CD-R (2003)
Reviewed this issue! Features trio of Rhodri Davies, Margarida Gracia and Nishida Takehiro.

The Sealed Knot, *Unwanted Object*
UNITED KINGDON CONFRONT COLLECTORS SERIES CCS1 (2004)
With Mark Wastell (double bass) and Burkhard Beins (percussion)

The Phant○m of ○○LIBERTY○○

AMM
At the Roundhouse
USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS
ICES 01 CD (2003)

Long-awaited release of this important document. AMM from 1972, from a time when they were performing as a duo – Eddie Prévost and Lou Gare, the saxophonist. One slice of sonic delight captured from the 1972 ICES festival in London. Previously, a small fragment of this recording was available as an EP on the INCUS label, a recorded artefact noteworthy in itself and highly prized by collectors (it was the first and last EP put out by INCUS, and the only time AMM appeared on the label). The word on the street is that this CD sold out at source very quickly. No wonder.

Lou Gare was one of the original members of the AMM lineup when the group formed in 1965. It may surprise people who seem to think that Keith Rowe is a permanent fixture of the group now that, between 1971 and 1976, he wasn't in AMM at all, and they operated as a sax-drums duo. Gare has stated many times how he loved the musical freedom that this opportunity afforded him. When Rowe rejoined the group, Gare found himself unable to carry on with AMM Music.

The ICES Festival was the International Carnival of Experimental Sound, an event that took place in London in August 1972. When one experiences the narrow range of what's on offer at music festivals in today's over-specialised atmosphere, ICES can appear quite miraculous in its Catholicism – a dazzling mix of sound performances drawn from jazz, improvisation, and underground rock, but also multi-media stuff like films and happenings. The intended 'theme' of Myth, Magic, Madness and Mysticism is also something to applaud.

The downside to all this happy post-hippy explosion of freedom is that Harvey Matusow, the entrepreneurial organiser of it, didn't exhibit the expected level of interest in financial reimbursement of the foregathered talent, a fact which continues to rankle those involved some 32 years later.

Many of the concerts were recorded at The Roundhouse venue in London, as was this. Prévost recalls vividly the indifferent audience witnessing their performance with something less than rapturous joy, as they shuffled about in the confines of this unfriendly cavernous dungeon. Unlike the 'knowing' and sophisticated audiences who swarm the streets of London like hungry wolves these days, I guess that in 1972 this improvisation lark was still a relatively new thing. Said punters must have stood there like a bunch of stone mullets; you can practically hear their withering, unimpressed silence, as manifested by lack of reaction or applause, coupled with audible walkouts, doors slamming and babies whimpering. Consequently, the music played is absolutely bristling with tension and life…both musicians were 'playing on the edge', as Prévost describes it now. Nothing like a moment of crisis to bring out the best in a man.

In this crisp and restored recording, you're practically there in the room, next to the instruments. The drum kit sounds like it's made out of glass, or highly brittle Bakelite; Prévost patters around it with his nimble stickwork like a swarm of locusts stripping vine leaves, and he strikes with the precision of a deadly cobra. Against this stark backdrop, you can really *hear* Lou Gare as if hearing his music for the first time; he has a beautifully 'clean' line of playing, no overblowing, no lazy drone effects, no showing off. Nothing but tautly-wound, tense free playing, yet still very much in an 'English' idiom. Traces of Ayler, Trane and Coleman may be in his music (as Prévost notes), but the concept of freedom handed down from these American giants is restated with a very English coolness, which is remarkable.

The silent gaps which appear in the continuity of the performance are pretty intense…nothing like the contrived silence that today's reduced improvisers incorporate into their performances as a matter of musical choice. AMM were thinking fast in response to the audience's near-total lack of engagement with the music. What they did to take control of the situation has to be heard to be believed; icy, will-of-iron, concentration does it, and having the musical skills to back it up. They play like condemned prisoners, fighting for their lives. Wow.

In all, a CD muchly recommended on many counts: collectors of AMM will cherish it as it fills a gap for this crucial transitional period, and is a very valuable update on the INCUS EP (this CD restores the original sleeve

artwork also); collectors of the ICES Festival likewise will experience some degree of thrill, although there isn't much ICES product available, and it remains to be seen if the Anomalous Project to release all the tapes (deposited at the University of Kansas) will continue. It's also recommended to anyone who simply loves great improvised music. You rarely get much better than this.

ED PINSENT 01/11/2004
PO Box 22195, Seattle, WA 98122-0195, USA
www.anomalousrecords.com

Keith Rowe / Axel Dörner / Franz Hautzinger

A View From The Window
USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 041 CD (2004)

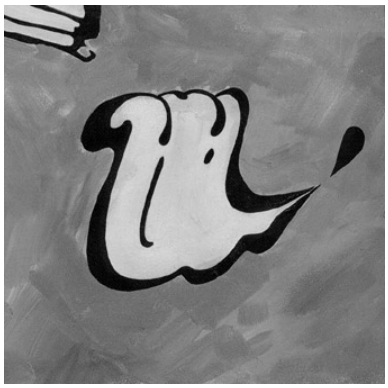
A topnotch piece of Keith Rowe product, this one recorded in a studio in Vienna and for which he joined up with two European trumpet players. Both Dörner and Hautzinger have an impressive track record in terms of utterly transforming the sound of their instruments, through their radical approach to playing. Who better to accompany them than the man who has so radically reinvented everything about his guitar?

The combination of the threesome is extremely successful and results in a delicious blend. On the first of these two cuts, Rowe lays down a solid, heavy fog of guitar-string hum and teeming amplifier buzz, while the two brass-men growl, gurgle and burble their statements through lengths of twisted metal. It's a stately, slow and utterly immersive piece of significant length. Give it time to proceed and unwind and reveal its complex delights. Although the second cut delivers pretty much more of the same, by this time listener should be practised enough to decode the purposeful buzz-and-drone works slowly unspooling. Meditational, warm, absorbing; only a cup of good green tea can promise as much.

Hautzinger made a 'landmark' release for GROB not so long ago, wherein he improvised with Derek Bailey, but also supervised the recording and (more importantly) its subsequent processing, which involved extensive cutting-up and reordering of the improvsational flow into new, exciting patterns. He doesn't do that here, by the way. I mention it because there's no need for him to do so; the work is exciting enough, and only a fool would dare to cut something that's so much of apiece. The woven pattern is already so beautiful, it should hang on the wall like a tapestry; why make it into a set of curtains?

The titles incorporate the names of oil paint colours. 'Magenta / Black' is the first, 'Cadmium Yellow / Turquoise' is the second. If you're of the sense-swapping persuasion, you may be one of the small percentage of people who can hear music as colours. If you do, then who knows but you may wish to take issue with the assigned colour scheme on this CD. These oil paint names clearly connect to the painting cover: there's a Rowe painting of said view from window, and a photograph of same for comparison, and the work suggests the processes (especially the length of time) involved in the production of art, observing and carefully delineating on canvas. However, I'd argue this CD isn't actually as 'colourful' as, say, the Rowe/Fennesz release on Erstwhile. The sound, though very full, is also rather static; not exactly washed-out, but not teeming with colourful vivacity either. If anything, these two long works are more like fine art sculptures. Using steel, wood, beams, blocks, basic shapes…like the work of Caro or some such. Long, linear, exploring and extending into space,

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004
www.erstwhilerecords.com



Keith Rowe / Christian Fennesz

Live at the LU
USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 043 CD (2004)

Another day, another Keith Rowe collaboration CD….but this one is on Erstwhile, the quality music label that just doesn't quit! One performance from May 2002; 43 minutes long; LU = Le Lieu Unique in Nantes, not far from home of Rowe, K. Fennesz, C visits like a diplomat with his small suitcase, importing digital mayhem from Austria. As it turns out, the encounter turned out successfully and reveals a highly sympathetic blend of Rowe's brand of non-specific noise (feedback, amp hum, shortwave radio, tabletop guitar noises, scraped strings etc) with Fennesz's brand (fizzling, crackling, digital, produced with laptop). Gestural actions meet programming actions, and the clash produces amazing results. It's hard to explain the effect, but when this really works the sounds seem to be physically mutating in and out of each other, much like Rob Botting's alien creature literally pushes aside the human flesh of his unfortunate victims in John Carpenter's *The Thing*. *Live at the LU* may not be as viscerally shocking in that way, but it sure gets the same job done.

Maybe Christian Fennesz ought to do more live 'jams' – sorry, improvisations – than his solo performances. Something about this tall, affable and charming fellow seems to bring out the best in other musicians; could be those friendly chord-like musical emissions of his, which tend to give his sparring partners something joyful to react against, or participate in. The two players here resemble two March hares, coming out battling with their powerful mitts, then skipping away from each other on supple hind legs. I'm trying to say something about separation. Maybe you'd prefer two battling scorpions? The *Honey Pie* CD is pretty much one big pile of musical murk, where all the contributing elements simply melted together in that pie during the bake. Here, everything is all crisp, deep-frozen, and tangible. You can almost finger the hard edges of each musical poppadum as it flies out of the hot oil.

Or maybe a musical cheeseburger. Morton Feldman was fond of a good greasy cheeseburger and rejoiced when he found a diner in NYC that could meet his burger needs…a story which many tell because it seems to go against the grain of his complex, serious music. Feldman also liked the paintings of Philip Guston. This CD art features what appear to be Philip Guston sketches, but turn out to be copies made by Friedrike Paetzold, the modernist artist who on this occasion sees fit to appropriate Guston's work. The front cover is an original painting by Rowe, which is effectively a blob of yellow mustard. Rowe depicts it with black-edged outlines like a Lichtenstein brushstroke painting. This condiment would sit nicely on said cheeseburger and conveys the 'tang' of this spicy musical encounter.

ED PINSENT 09/10/2004
www.erstwhilerecords.com

Keith Rowe / Oren Ambarchi / Robbie Avenaim

Honey Pie
GERMANY GROB 648 CD (2004)

A single live piece recorded at a music festival. One noticeable element in the international 'avant' scene these days is the abundance of music festivals, and the appearance of Keith Rowe at many of them. *Honey Pie* is captured from Musique Action, a French festival, in May 2001. Here Keith Rowe joins the guitars of the two Australian players who made the exceptional CD *The Alter Rebbe's Niggun* for the Tzadik label; and spewed forth radical, annoying, punk-noise rock as The Menstruation Sisters. Oren Ambarchi, no stranger to *The Sound Projector*, has been in the ascent for many years now and is not only

familiar on the festival circuit, he even organises one himself.

These contemporary festivals increasingly go for some form of 'crossover' content, mixing electronica with improvised music, and musicians who would never normally meet in other circumstances are encouraged to play together in interesting group combinations. Maybe they encourage themselves, or maybe tour promoters or record label bosses do it, but either way the results – increasingly being issued as product - do suggest a certain promiscuity among players, which makes Company Week look positively disciplined in comparison. As to choice of which performances to issue as commercially available CDs, it's not difficult to imagine that having a famous name on the cover helps with sales; Rowe is such a name.

Honey Pie is a fairly good example of abstract guitar noise and it's as good as any other abstract avant guitar music currently available. But that's about all one can say, as it certainly isn't an essential purchase. As the trio lock antlers, a slow and pensive atmosphere is generated, in midst of which fug Rowe hovers like a Tibetan monk in contemplative mode. The two Australians seem slightly in awe of Rowe's brooding magnificence, and their early contributions are filled with caution. The event becomes slightly more spirited at about the 16-minute mark, with plenty of 'chattering insect' guitar sounds, generated by nervy twiddling with electronic effects. After 21 minutes, we're getting down to business, with heavy bass throbbings underpinning the semi-chaotic shimmerings and feedback fragments flying everywhere. Shame these records take so long to get going…the improvisation builds up to a reasonably raucous climax, leaving listener vaguely satisfied.

ED PINSENT 30/09/2004
Goertz Klopotek GbR, Alte Koelner Str 10, D-40699, Erkrath
www.churchofgrob.com

Tomas Korber / erikm / Toshimaru Nakamura / Otomo Yoshihide

Brackwater

SWITZERLAND FOR4EARS CD 1550 CD (2004)

Excellent quartet improv, mostly in live electronics and sampling mode. Tomas Korber is a relative newcomer who 'wins his spurs' here as he matches wits with two major players from the Japanese camp (Otomo and Toshi) and French sampling genius erikm. Korber plays guitar, sampler and live electronics, but does seem content to relegate himself to a supporting role for the most part. On the 22-minute title track, he adds a respectful backdrop comprising a gentle, chiming murmur from his restrained guitar, while the other three players go quietly bonkers with their feedback, turntabling and mad electronic interpolations, leaping on their equipment like wild monkeys.

My ears may be incorrect about the precise degree of contribution Korber makes to the 'Brackwater' track, but either way it's a particularly strong piece of studio improvisation: crunching sounds, feedback whoops and dark-stained rumblings, all played with killer-precision dynamics. The music is a vast field filled with clever, cross-flowing rhythms, gorgeous sounds and textures, and tremendous group interaction. If improvisers were soldiers, then Otomo and Toshimaru would be highly-prized and highly-paid mercenaries, valued for their crack sharpshooter and sniper skills; while erikm would be reckoned as a secret weapon, toying like a mad scientist with his 3-K pad system and shooting out lethal samples like Cruise missiles. In such a scheme, Brackwater would win the Cold War once and for all! This release is a major goodie, although we can't quite claim that it will 'point into another direction in the ever-changing field of improvisation', as claimed in press release.

For the second track, Tosihmaru drops out as he goes back home to complete the mastering of another 50 CDs in his studio, leaving the remaining trio to lay down a good, sustained droning work; which isn't to suggest that this one, titled 'And a slice of bread', is monolithic or dull, since it's pulling in 18 directions simultaneously and concealing lots of hidden depths in the quietly pulsing veins of its gigantic torso. Voice samples join the all-electronic miasma of sonic delight. Gestural actions cause it to throw off solar flares, acquire the rings of Saturn as it completes its cosmic voyage. Another well-planned piece, of which the final 5-6 minutes are very effective, fading away into ever-increasing high tones and pitches. Great.

ED PINSENT 24/10/2004
www.for4ears.com

Walter / Drumm / Lonberg-Helm

Eruption

GERMANY GROB 546 CD (2003)

Here's a great sprawling noise-fest – excessive, busy, detailed, varied, out of control…recorded in Europe, but all three players are American, big noises on the Chicago improv scene. It's somewhere between free improv and Speed Metal. Kevin Drumm, he of recent and impressive MEGO-label excesses which have appalled sensible people everywhere. He gets his greasy fingers onto everything he can get a hold on; electric

guitar, tapes, microphones, snyths and effects pedals, but mostly electric guitar. Every part of his body is brought into play – hands, fingers, feet, teeth, penis, asshole…and he lets rips with every trick in the book, all in the name of loosening the restraints from the creative life-force and 'expressing his Death Metal obsessions'. He's ably supported in this mischief by a demon named Weasel Walter, a drummer sent here by the Devil, who's constantly busy banging the skins like a younger, punked-up version of Han Bennink on speed. Weasel Walter is a young improviser / multi-media guy, former member of The Flying Luttenbachers; on his website, his appearance in facepaint gives him aspect of a malevolent clown. Fred Lonberg-Holm completes the trio, sawing his violin like a maniac howling for an antidote for the poison he just drank.

Weasel Walter may be the ringleader for this piece of mayhem. A few years ago he made another speed-metal improv record for the GROB label, also with Lonberg-Holm but with Jim O'Rourke (another Chicago player) on guitar instead of Drumm. It was a tribute record to Masayuki Takayanagi. It seems he got into a little hot water because people thought he was making fun of the great man. Determined to give it another go, Walter convened the present session and attempted to explore further his free jazz/death metal preoccupations, while retaining mental image of Takayanagi uppermost in mind. A path already trodden by John Zorn, some might say - if you recall the 1989 *Spy Vs Spy* LP, the tunes of Ornette Coleman played in style of Napalm Death. But that's not to deny the fierce spirit and conviction on offer here; plus, this record is much louder than Zorn's!

After hearing a fair number of minimal-improv records this season, *Eruption* comes to me as something of a change of pace, to say the least…it's maximal to the max, the pace is frenetic, the attack mode is 'full-on', the sound is swamped with over-the-top feedback and 'damn the torpedoes' is the motto of all three spirited Yankee players. In this 'work', the performance is structured across three distinct 'movements', which follow themes of blood, excrement and mania…in fact, the index points (of which there are 40) are completely meaningless, as this is a non-stop continuous performance, not even faked by use of tape edits unless I miss my guess. If you want to read the 40 hilarious titles, you gotta buy the record…they are satirical barbs, spoofs of stereotypical 'insider talk' of

contemporary improvisers, who moan about lack of sales, the uneasy relation with the audience and the uninformed music press, the futility of doing it in the first place…jolly good stuff. A good hot-blooded, angry and exciting piece of noisy improvisation, recommended to fans of Ascension and like that…it's energetic all the time…masturbatory…kinetic…fun!

ED PINSENT 30/10/2004
Goertz Klopotek GbR, Alte Koelner Str 10, D-40699, Erkrath
www.churchofgrob.com

Rebecca
(Two Variations)
GERMANY CHARIZMA CHA022 CD (2003)

Wrapped in colourful and unassuming sleeve (it's details of cities and parks) comes charming improvised duo music from Germany. Michael Renkel is the guitarist and electronics expert whom we interviewed in issue 10, and he's on the acoustic guitar here. Kai Fagashinski plays clarinet in fairly uninhibited manner. Working pretty much in seclusion in comfort of Kai's home, they set themselves the interesting task of improvising and re-improvising, repeating the same piece over and over again, hence the two 'variations' of the Rebecca theme on offer here. Quiet and gentle music issues forth, on human and intimate scale. Although Renkel employs some unspecified 'preparations' on these recordings, they are nothing like the extensive reworkings for which he was known in 2002. At that time he would process recordings of improvised music until they were utterly changed, now seems content to enjoy continuity and rawness of sound. His organic approach means his guitar strums clusters of chimey notes as tasty as soft summer fruits, while clarinet sings contentedly to self like a drugged nightingale, or purrs like a tiger with a bowl of double cream.

Rapport between this duo allows small-scale gestures to be repeated and extended over a comparatively large area; evidence of their intense concentration is audible in any given segment of music. The method of repeat-improvisation has truly allowed them to enter the heart of what they're doing; training and using their memory to improve, deepen and strengthen the work. They state this process of repetition 'reduces the concept of improvisation to absurdity'; on the contrary, there's nothing absurd or meaningless about this strong, wiry and beautiful work.

ED PINSENT 22/09/2004
www.charizma.com
www.michaelrenkel.de
www.fagaschinski.com

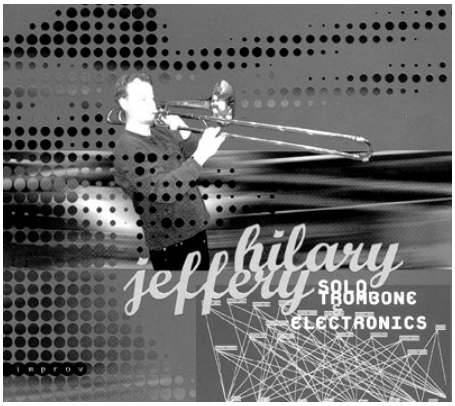
Dual
Destroy All Improv
USA TOAST AND JAM RECORDINGS T&J 014 CD-R [2002]

29 tracks – very short, concentrated bursts of manic, frantic energy, channelled into lively and aggravating music to start your day better than a flask of hot java. Doug Theriault mangles his guitar, Ed Chang slaughters an electronics kit, and together they improvised everything live in the studio in NYC in year 2002. Besides being energetic, it's also pretty violent stuff – picking up trace elements from hip-hop, Napalm Death, Sonny Sharrock, and erm…anti-capitalist protest marches. From hip-hop music for example, they clearly like the idea of crash-collision sound sources used with mucho aggression, but they discard everything else from said genre. Napalm Death have taught them how to keep tracks really short (an excellent idea which more improvising musicians should take on board), and Sharrock has opened doors for the guitarist's free-form notions. I thought anti-capitalist content was made explicit on cover art - a car being wrecked - but maybe that's just vandalism for its own sake! Maybe this whole record is vandalism against 'proper' music, which they feel needs to be destroyed. A harsh surface prevails for the most part, and loose bohemian-styled playing throughout. By about mid-point of CD, these two hyper-active youngsters calm down slightly and the initial frenetic mood subsides into more considered forms; but the erratic playing style is not less predictable, guaranteeing more surprises per square inch than your average kettle of improvised fish. As to the imaginative track titles, they're all pretty witty, but what could possibly beat 'Topography of my rectum'? Heck, that may even be a bratty, sarcastic response to the title of INCUS I (look it up, sports fans). A real goodie – plenty of stuttering, feedback, controlled explosions and hairy, electrifying, 'gestural' art music.

ED PINSENT 30/09/2004
www.tandjrec.com

Hilary Jeffery
Solo Trombone and Electronics
THE NETHERLANDS FMR RECORDS FMRCD129-I0803 CD (2003)

Excellent recordings of one man, his trombone, and his voice…and the help of a few sparingly-used studio effects. Improvising with conviction, Hilary J turns in some excellent 'clean' performances as he growls and drones his way through nine studio constructs. The sound and structures remind one of a Stockhausen composition, such as *Stimmung* or something from *Aus Den Sieben Tagen*; although this is probably a superficial reaction of my ears which respond like



Pavlov's dog to use of the good old ring modulator. A tremendous amount of variety – there's tunes, snatches of tunes, drones, pure noise, improvised and composed, overdubbing, and plenty of growling voice effects roaring in, like comical lions and monkeys. No single approach confines his free playing, and there's a real facility to the way he slides his 'bone and controls his breathing; 'clean and articulate lines', is the verdict of James Fulkerson, a fellow 'bonist. Hugely enjoyable... a CD of great invention. Recorded in Utrecht by Robert Bosch and in the UK by John Richards.

ED PINSENT 06/10/2004
www.fmr-records.com
www.hijef.com

Outward Sound Ensemble with Martin Archer
Cloudburst
UNITED KINGDOM DISCUS 17CD
CD (2004)

This is a Martin Archer associated sound-work, one which I presume he organised in terms of setup and production, and he also added his own contributions and released finished item on his own Discus label in Sheffield. It's a long and tremendously subtle work, for which you need to devote the hour's attention it deserves as it slowly reveals its secrets, like a labyrinth. The name Outward Sound Ensemble strikes one as interesting and perhaps throwing a lifeline back to the past, it the 'golden age' of 1970s improv when the John Stevens groups Spontaneous Music Ensemble and Spontaneous Music Orchestra held sway. SME, SMO, now OSE. In fact, that's a spurious line of argument, since (unlike those large combos) there are only two players in this Ensemble – three if you count Mr Archer.

The work in question appears to be a one-off. It utilises a very contemporary recording technique, ie a stereo binaural microphone system, which is so sophisticated and effective that you don't require a mixing desk to get good results. Accordingly, the CD delivers an amazingly vivid sound, the trademark of aural quality you've come to expect from Discus…and then some. It's so authentic you can almost smell the freshmints on the breath of the two Canadian performers. Herb Bayley puffs air through tubes of wind brass instruments, to wit the trombone and the trumpet. Chris Meloche hunches gnome-like over his table-top guitar. They were both doing it live in Canada in June 2003. Martin Archer was not there, yet he still manages to add an electronic manipulated violin...how? 'I recorded a 60 minute solo improvisation which I mailed to Chris and Herb, who made the final piece by playing along with it live in real time as if I were with them,' Archer reports. 'They played it back through speakers so that it was a presence in their playing space, rather than just dubbing onto it. I think they listened to it once before making their recording, probably to check I hadn't screwed up and to learn how I finished.'

Outward Sound Ensemble see improvisation as a long walk through an abandoned factory, whose windows are smashed allowing gusts of wind to traverse bleak empty corridors. Their performances are measured, quiet and deliberative, producing effects that are ethereal and fugitive, but there's no concealing the wiry strength at the core. Like ink stains on a cotton shirt, there's no shifting these sounds. This may be adding another dialect to the many languages already spoken in the quiet improv school; their speech patterns are mostly grindy, with no recognisable words – only disjunctive chunks of buzz, buzz, rumble and chomp. In all, it's a compelling hour of low-key mysterious electro-acoustic grumbling.

Point of pride for Archer is that a thunderstorm broke out during the recording session. Said storm did not disturb for one second concentration of players, who continued to play with lofty indifference to elements and forces of Mother Nature. Said storm can also be clearly heard on CD; it 'added to the atmosphere of the session', says Archer, as he felt inspiration for CD title descend upon him, like a precipitation. All concerned feel that this is a document of a 'special moment…all the elements completely fell into place'.

ED PINSENT 06/10/2004
PO Box 658, Sheffield, S10 3YR, UK
www.discus-music.co.uk

Tony Buck and Axel Dörner
Durch und Durch
AUSTRALIA VITAMIN RECORDS
TESCD0103 CD (2004)

Fairly unusual and good improv meeting between Australian percussionist Tony Buck and German trumpeter Axel Dörner. Buck is a member of The Necks, but has also featured on *Berlin Drums*, one of the Absinth series of comps of German improv. Dörner is of course a firm fixture in the lively Berlin improv world, and I note that Asi Föcker (see also the *Labor* comp this ish) did the fine letterpress cover on card digipack for this Australian release. The title translates as 'through and through', reflecting the duo's tramping 'on and on through these different imaginary landscapes'.

This 'acoustic journey' is a pretty good showcase for both players, but particularly

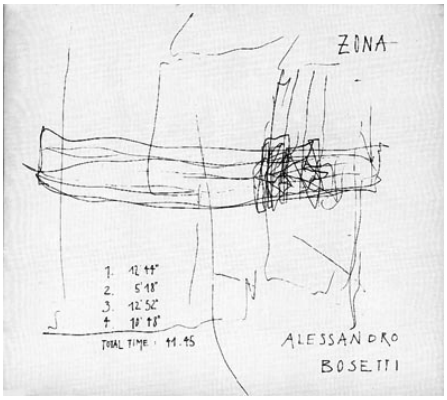
Axel who wields his squeaky, breath-propelled trumpet and a laptop computer to boot. 40 minutes of nutsoid wheezing and rattling noise results. It has a nice perplexing effect. You just can't beat a record that chunters on in unbroken noisy mode for long, continuous stretches. This must be what it's like to be married to a fat, naggy wife. And Axel D surpasses himself. The racket he makes is more like a jetplane motor or a ride on waterskis. Could be these digital 'treatments' of his that are adding a certain 'longevity' or 'staying power' to his puffs…and the percussionist Buck drives it all along like a tractor riding over stony, bumpy turf, or recently ploughed fields.

Axel D seems on this occasion at least to have forsaken the quiet/reduced mode in which he used to make many interesting explorations, but continues to remain fairly pleased with the sound of his own puff. Perhaps in the next life he should be reincarnated as a blow-fish or puffer-fish…that would be poetic justice for you. The computer treatments, without getting in the way, also seem to add a new dimension to his 'work'. They transform the textures, add new depths and delineate areas of doomy steeliness. It's not all Dörner's record of course, but somehow my pen can't find anything very poetic to say about Buck's rattling fine percussion work. Besides the endless blithering-mode hinted at above, this record can also be as creaky and slow as 'virtual' version of AMM. In all, it's a muttery-grindamaroo-puffin special. Very good.

ED PINSENT 20/10/2004

Alessandro Bosetti
Zona
GERMANY GROB 652 CD (2004)

Rising star of the 'big horn', Bosetti elsewhere in this issue does his electro-acoustic turn, but this is the kind of thing we know him for – whipping out his huge soprano sax in all its quivering majesty. Like discs by Stéphane Rives and Axel Dörner this issue, this CD is really more a recording of improvised *breathing* than of improvised saxophone playing. Which is a pretty good way to go, if you get off on heavy breathing…the first track in particular sounds positively obscene. The things he's doing to that long, hard length of throbbing metal with his mouth, lips, tongue and lungs beggars belief. 12 ecstatic minutes of hard, sucking action…for the listener, it's



exactly the same as being French-kissed by a rutting elk. You can feel the elk's steamy, ragged breath pouring out of both nostrils, rock under his jerking hips, hear those satisfied grunts…how many improv records give you all that?

On the second cut, it's not quite so sensuous – AB is using his lungs to shoot poison-tip darts out of a blowpipe and scoring a bullseye every time. And using live captives for target practice, too. These boys take no prisoners. Still not a single recognisable musical note as yet, just constant puffing, sucking and tonguing…third track is more narrative in intent, depicting a lonely mariner on board some lost arctic schooner, whistling to himself for company while a polar bear growls nearby. Icy winds blow. He tries to warm up his wireless set (know what I mean!) without much success.

Fourth track is something of a departure from the above sex-filled shenanigans, being slightly more restrained, but with plenty of airy and watery detail to be observed in these gentle squeaks. Only topnotch, close-miked digital recording methods can hope to capture these fleeting, imperceptible musical impressions. A mad solo work by this up-and-coming (know what I mean!) improv star. Also includes some of his incoherent, Mongoloid scrawled artwork on the cover. A fine Felix Klopotek production.

ED PINSENT 20/10/2004
Goertz Klopotek GbR, Alte Koelner Str 10, D-40699, Erkrath
www.churchofgrob.com

Ambarchi / Müller / Samartzis
Strange Love
SWITZERLAND FOR4EARS CD 1448 CD (2003)

A decent title on Günter Müller's label where he gets to showcase his improvising skills and join two Australian players in live performances. Oren Ambarchi is here, as organiser of the What Is Music? Festival in the Antipodes, whence comes the first cut recorded July 2002, with his guitar and live electronics; Müller plays usual percussion, minidiscs, Ipod recordings, and live electronics; and Melbourne artist Philip Samartzis completes the trio with his field recordings and yet more live electronics. Yep, a fair old bit of electricity is being used up here…and this disc opens with a good 7-8 minutes of solid buzzing and humming that's like having your index finger plugged into the mains while simultaneously being pounded about the head with soft, spongey baseball bats.

Density further increases and clicks and throbs are tossed into the cooking pot of improvised stew…fortunately, though surface resembles something rescued from the digital realms, this music is nothing like the drivel that issues from the mouths of the laptop masturbators, with their infantile patches and plugs, and you can certainly tell it is being delivered live. Though performers may appear to be making minimal effort, they're probably sweating like hogs to make it appear effortless…and music delivers a hefty punch which is not inconsiderable. But then it's not all as 'alien' as they would like us to believe…this supposition comes from sleeve which is covered with images of odd furry beasts, which I take to be wallabies. Photographed, not unwillingly, in the darkness of night, the pink staring eyes of these monsters are probably intended to convey the 'strangeness' of their 'strange love'. I mean the improvisers, not the wallabies. Perhaps that is indeed a fitting name for the unknown emotion that tends to bind festival-playing improv types together for the duration of that short liaison.

Did I say short? Heck, we're still on 'Cooler' here, a long and slow drawn-out textured long-form piece of longnesss, set forth at great length…I don't hate this stuff, but why does it take so long to say what it has to say? Ah – some interesting 'water' sounds coming in now, doubtless courtesy of Samartzis, P and his tape archive. His intervention seems to have confused the other two players slightly! Water and cooler…must be a musical pun, because the other track 'Warmer' conversely opens with the sound of fire crackling. It's joined by suitably portentous clouds of sonic doom and heavy, death-dealing pulsebeats. This patchwork quilt dating Aug-Oct 2003 seems to been assembled in three different places, so it's most likely a 'send each other discs through the mail' job, the finished work coming to life in the hard drive. Though slowish, *Strange Love* is on balance a lot more interactive and active than a lot of the ultra-quiet stuff in the field just now, and not half bad.

ED PINSENT 05/10/2004
www.for4ears.com

Anthony Guerra / Paul Hood / Joel Stern
Low Resistance Group
JAPAN PARA DISC PACD012 CD (2003)

Evidence that these players from the small-ish label TwoThousandAnd are starting to gain ground and recognition with this elegantly-presented release on a Japanese label. The Japan label is not inappropriate given presence of Paul Hood on this disc, and his knowledge of the history and present state of play of all things Japanese and musical – his excellent radio show on Resonance 104.4 FM station, and role of organiser of many great Japanese gigs at former Centurion venue in London. Here's he's playing his little record player as if in homage to Otomo Yoshihide. This set collects 6 improvisations with Hood, Stern and Guerra, all live performance and most of them banged down onto the tape in a single day – the only exception being track 4, a radio broadcast. And convincing material it be to boot. Broadly, we hear a trio mix of unusual dynamics wielding the guitar (Guerra), turntabling (Hood) and field recordings played live (Stern), though there's also elements of live mixing desk and non-descript electronics. Judging by past recordings, each of these guys have muddled through well enough, but this is one of the most impressive sets I've heard from them so far. Each track – the opener in particular – exerts a compelling magnetic pull on the listener, with gently throbbing fields of drones, crackles and fizzles. Now and again the field recordings – such as voices of children at play – drift in.

Tiny quibbles that a critical mind could make: there are occasional lapses by all concerned into sketchiness and half-formed doodling, which leads to some tracks moving swiftly into the zone of inconsequence and finding it hard to back out of this cul-de-sac; but at least there is some actual playing of instruments going on. Maybe not quite enough of it, because like so many nowadays the trio appear more interested in 'finding sounds' than in anything resembling conventional musicianship. So about 30% of their time is employed – or wasted – while they do the finding. Of course, once all three reach a mutually happy plateau then the confluence of activity gels quite nicely. This gelling is most in evidence on track 6, where the diffuse and disjunctive drones all lock together into a strong statement that could persuade even the most cynical listener that black is white.

Third and final quibble regards sameiness of pace; entire CD proceeds at same leisurely, loping step and seems in fact to be driven by the rotational speed of Paul Hood's record player, which is exceptionally slow and grindy. But quibbles are finally outweighed by variances in the textures and depths of the music, which are far from 'minimalist' and are packed with warmth and detail. Plus there's a gorgeously vivid recording quality, very up-close and intimate – which may reflect quality of modern equipment more than anything, but adds considerably to weight of conviction.

Fifth cut is said radio broadcast. In a way the

strongest cut here, as they seem to get a little more 'carried away' than normal and less politely respectful of each other's space. Politeness may be the death of good music, but this isn't to say bad manners have the opposite effect. Note sleeve photos and design by Michael Rodgers, also of TwoThousandAnd.

ED PINSENT 18/09/2004
56 Benkeiishi-cho, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8082, Japan
www.parallaxrecords.jp

Korber / Müller / Steinbrüchel
Momentan Def
SWITZERLAND CUT 010 CD (2003)

Additional to *Brackwater*, here's more music showcasing the talents of Tomas Korber, along with two other Swiss players Günter Müller and his Ipod full of samples, and Steinbrüchel on his G3 Apple Mac laptop. Korber brings guitar, minidiscs and live electronics to the party, so you may guess that many watts of electricity were consumed in Zurich this fine day in 2002. Unlike *Brackwater*, this is a very restrained affair, lacking tension; everything converges to make a gentle, lapping effect. I think one track is a live performance and the other 3 are remixes of same; about which I can't get too excited, frankly. For some reason I think of an old *Punch* cartoon from the 1970s. A couple are left together at a cocktail party with disastrous results, because 'their only social asset is they're very good listeners'. The same observation might be said to apply here. I would suggest that Korber and Müller would be assets in an improv combo where the other guys are all show-offs, in which scenario they can listen respectfully to the ego-merchants and add the necessary sonic 'glue' to keep everything together. However, an entire CD of polite listening with no statements made could be what we're dealing with here…inoffensive, tasteful.

ED PINSENT 26/10/2004
www.cut.fm

Matthew Earle / Will Guthrie / Adam Sussmann
Bridges
AUSTRALIA ANTBOY MUSIC ANTBOY03 CD (2003)

Good set of slow, electronic/acoustic improv from these Australians; percussionist Will Guthrie, whose *Building Blocks* CD met with Jennifer's approval last ish, does shine particularly. He's aided muchly by live electronics from Matthew Earle, and guitar work from Adam Sussmann. 'Bridges 1' seems to have come straight from the Australian landscape, depicting a massive telegraph system across the desert (most likely the Overland Telegraph Line, completed in 1872) where hi-tension cables are fizzing with energy. Plenty of slowly-bowed percussion, in the Prévost/AMM mode…extremely slow-moving, deep and resonant. The sound they make together is very considered, with never a foot put wrong; a good sustained meditation.

'Bridges 2' is even slower, if that's possible; the portentous and weight feel to the music suggests, this time, the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge (completed in 1932). Steel girders are being swung into place. The metallic percussion of Guthrie seems the most noticeable musical element, but the electronics add highlights of sparking juice, and power-generator styled humming drones. As before, the three players lock together well into a single unit, delivering committed and concentrational statements. The continuous sound draws you in, and grows on you rapidly; you keep listening to observe the slow development. Gradually, from quiet beginnings, a very filled-out sound is developed. Watch the bridge rusting.

'Bridges 3' is quite another story. Adam Sussmann wields his electric guitar with awesome results; once again (sorry to keep throwing in the AMM references) it's amazingly similar to recent recorded work of Keith Rowe. The guitar joins hands with other varied drones and textures in the improvisational diorama, and plenty of ever-circling whirls and burrs start spinning in all directions. A very pleasing and highly musical document. Check it out.

ED PINSENT 21/10/2004
www.antboymusic.com

Norbert Möslang
_lat_nc_
SWITZERLAND FOR4EARS 1549 CD (2004)

Heigh-ho…yet another example of why Voice Crack worked better as a duo. On these six tracks of burbling electronic bric-a-brac, Norbert gives us plenty of nice sounds, but his performances are largely lacking in tension. Plenty of fizzing, hissing, bubbling, bleeps, rattles and twitches, producing the familiar 'cauldron of soup' effect. But this time the chef forgot to add any hot peppers. This kind of flabby, self-indulgent nonsense diminishes the legacy of Voice Crack; where as a duo they worked hard and were exciting, this is

lazy and unengaging. I wonder why he bothered with this dreary, unnecessary release of uninspired dribble. Recorded during March 2002 at the Zack studio in Switzerland. I wish it had stayed there.

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004
www.for4ears.com

Raised By Wolves
We am monstroum
UNITED KINGDOM RAISED #1 CD-R (2004)

Opening moments of this disc gave me some hopes, but it turns out to be an ineffectual duo bashing out their half-baked noise-improv workouts. They seem to be based in Brighton, UK. Matt Colgate uses guitar and, occasionally, a very quiet organ; Andy Pyne drums. If you're into the power of avant guitar-drum combos like Ascension, Blue Humans and Daily Dance, then stay with those bands; Raised By Wolves have not one iota of that intensity at their disposal. By the second track, it's clear these guys aren't really serious about improving their music; they're a failed heavy metal band, with half-understood poorly-played rock riffs abounding. Even their sound lacks force; that guitar could definitely do with scuzzing up, they've no idea how to mike up drums to deliver any effect, and the organ is pallid and wimpy. Some may enjoy their unskilled and ham-fisted approach, but the duo haven't even got the energy to sustain that! Raised By Wolves? More like 'Raised By Granny's Little Lapdogs'…yapping and yapping, chasing their own tails.

ED PINSENT 27/09/2004
wherestheheads@hotmail.com
www.geocities.com/wherestheheads/wolves

Oren Ambarchi
Grapes from the Estate
UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TO:61 CD (2004)

A further collection of solo recordings from this modern Australian maestro of the guitar, and to be frank it's not a particularly essential release. Ambarchi virtually has a trademark 'sound' these days, but increasingly his work seems to lack the urgency and sheer delight in the possibilities of studio experiment that characterised the solo LPs he made for his own Jerker Productions label. Or indeed the suffused emotion inherent in 'L'eclisse', the tribute tune to his dead father on 2000's Insulation. Here, he gets some assist in the production area from Scott Horscroft, another Australian guitar fellow whose 8 Guitars CD we tested last ish; and there is a string duo guesting on the third track, to generally queasy effect. But it's mostly Oren and his guitar, with characteristic big sound replete with that intense deep-bass throb and judder that damages hi-fi systems across the world. A trade secret; who knows how he gets his guitar to sound so unlike a guitar? Does he ever overdub? You put it on and start off with 'Corkscrew' and admittedly, it's amazing at first –more like the chiming of

huge bells than a guitar, only synthetic bells made out of huge blocks of red vacuum-formed plastic, playing a large complex chord in slow motion. But then the next track, 'Girl with the Silver Eyes' is almost identical in tone, timbre and key, apart from addition of a lazy organ drone and a drumkit performing a slow shuffle. Some 15 minutes later and you're already starting to tire of that odd 'cut-off' clicking noise, which is riddled throughout this LP like speed bumps in a built-up area. Maybe he's switching between pick-ups, or switching between guitar FX, or hitting switches on a mixing board to perform some form of live editing; whatever, it's something of an irritant. 'Remedios The Beauty' hears him joined by string session players, whose ill-fitting additions merely induce nausea. As a long-time supporter of Oren's music, I'm trying hard with this one, but can't hear anything more than rather listless and boring studio tomfoolery and process-art droning. If these are the grapes from his vineyard, then it's not been a vintage year for the Ambarchi Cabernet Sauvignon; not enough alcohol content, it's just grape juice.

ED PINSENT 04/10/2004
www.touchmusic.org.uk
www.orenambarchi.com

Paul Hood
cplastsics
UNITED KINGDOM TWOTHOUSANDAND 2++8 CD (2004)

Hood's an all-round good guy in South London, one time host for the Centurion venue in Lewisham, presenter of radio show on Japanese contemporary music, and collector of 1960s Japanese pop singles in their lurid, candy-coloured picture sleeves. He's also an improviser. See above for his work in a group context, but on this solo record (scooped up from various live performances in London and Denmark) there are 8 live performances of him with his GP3 record player played through a mixing desk. So far so good…of course there are no records placed on said record-player at time of performance. With this action, Hood joins the few players who are treating the record-less turntable as an instrument in itself; you could compare with two other records in this ish, namely Ferran Fages on Rossbin, or Otomo's release on the Alcohol label. Hood, is not a violent, manic wielder of the tonearm, though. Instead he opts mostly for a gentle churning noise; and he applies his paw to stop the deck rotating, thus interrupting the constant grumbling sound. Amplified small objects also come into play; on 'Primitive style' it could be the amplified plucking of an old plastic comb, or something. 'Career System' is at least one example where he offers some respite from the rhythmical grindery and clattery approach, with a decent blast of feedback noise. Ay, the approaches are surprisingly varied given that what we have is fundamentally an 'empty' process, but do we really require 8 examples of it? An EP's worth of material, pressed in vinyl preferably, would have suited me fine. It's process work,

one that allows machines to do most of the work, preferably old and malfunctioning machines; this is the path Philip Jeck might have taken if he dispensed with vinyl altogether and just collected old gramophones for their own sake. *cplastsics* is of interest, but generally suffers from the lack of depth I associate with releases on this label; the same sounds keep reappearing, often at the same tempo and same pitch, lending a monotonous feeling and inducing listener fatigue quite quickly.

ED PINSENT 27/10/2004
www.twothousandand.com

Poire_Z and Phil Minton
_q
SWITZERLAND FOR4EARS 1551 CD (2004)

On this, the basic poire_z line-up is augmented by the great UK voice maverick Minton; the four instrumentalists (Möslang, Guhl, Müller and erikm) create the usual mish-mash stew of slow and fizzy electronica laden with samples, and do it over the course of one sprawling track 'W oder Q' clocking in at over 39 minutes. Another slow starter I'm afraid. When they do get warmed up, the combo manage a fairly good pro-active noise; it starts off as low-key gurgling and mysterious blither, until the forces of darkness begin to gather and it gains some weight. In the midst of all the gently globbling digital and analogue activity, Minton adds a very human dimension, and his brand of exciting gibberish seems almost unearthly in this context. With his constipated mouth-gasps, spittle-filled dribbles and heavy wheezes, he's one of the closest things the UK has to Henri Chopin. There's a fair bit of time-wasting in this performance,

but when the boys achieve the necessary 'full-on' vibe and lock their virtual antlers together, this CD generates a combination of sounds the like of which you've never heard before.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2004
www.for4ears.com

The BSC
Good
GERMANY GROB 543 CD (2003)

Bhob Rainey, Greg Kelley and several other quiet Americans join forces with two prominent Euro improvisers, Axel Dörner and Andrea Neumann, for a single 37-minute large-combo improvisation. It was recorded in Boston in August 2001 and comprises a lot of sussurating, purring and glottal glops – besides all the brass instruments, there is a cello, bass, guitar, Theremin, voice, inside-piano and live tape manipulation. The performance is respectful and spacey, but it's not very lively; and is very short on interest in the actual sounds made. Given the wide range of instrumentation as noted, this flatness is rather surprising. In other words, great interaction on the part of the players, but I think they simply forgot to listen to what they were playing.

ED PINSENT 12/10/2004
Goertz Klopotek GbR, Alte Koelner Str 10, D-40699, Erkrath
www.churchofgrob.com
http://homepage.mac.com/bhobr

Various Acquiescent Citizens
Life is OK
UNITED KINGDOM MY GIANT MUM RECORDING MGM-002 CD-R (2003)

This features a remarkable performance from the trio of Rhodri Davies, Margarida Gracia and Nishida Takehiro; whether they played before or since I know not, but they certainly got everything right on this night of May 2003 at The Empire, London. A truly fine example of focused, minimal improvisation that is almost steely in its determined aspect. Long sustained grindings, rumble and gentle tremors, almost entirely in acoustic mode. Strings and low-volume feedback do more than interact successfully; the very sounds interweave, like close-stitched tapestry. Repay the concentration of the players with your own concentrated listening, and you're in for a wonderful time. The second track is by Rohan Thomas, Matthew Hyland and Daniel Beban; same date, same festival. They produced a decent enough scrapey and crackling noise; but it has to be said, not in the same league as the above piece, which has genuine authority and scoops the prize. The second release on this tiny UK label.

ED PINSENT 24/10/2004
mygiantmum@yahoo.co.uk

• MERZBOW •

• BATTRACHIANS AND PTARMIGANS

Merzbow
Frog +
USA MISANTHROPIC AGENDA RECORDS MAR004 2 x CD (2002)

Merzbow nowadays manifests and celebrates the glories and mysteries of natural wildlife, an 'ecological' tack which other critics have noticed. While on the original *Frog* LP he concentrates his efforts on depicting a single beast, *Animal Magnetism* makes more generalised comments on wildlife and birdlife (farm stock in particular). The box set *24 Hours: A Day of Seals* is even grander, an entire virtual environment in which arctic wildlife might flourish and prevail. *Frog+* is the item I have in my paws, a double-CD reissue job of luxury proportions, and feels as heavyweight as the pulsing music it contains.

The double CD remix of *Frog* is another story altogether, but this Texan label has done a masterful job in repackaging and enhancing the original, now rare and deleted, vinyl *Frog*. It includes visual elements, a screensaver designed by Masami Akita, and sumptuous sleeve art. These images alone might give you some clue as to what you're in for. The Frog has featured in Japanese art for, I don't know, at least 300 years...one thinks of Japanese prints where amphibian wildlife features, not always as the main subject, but as a detail lurking at the feet of a poet or courtesan. Even in that most lowbrow of art forms, the Japanese Flower cards, the frog appears on the November Rain card on a bridge crossed by a poet holding a parasol, and playing that card gains 20 points. Masami rethinks the image of a frog in totally psychedelic terms, and his frogs are glowing, neon-coloured pulsating animals, their bright colours contrasting on a jet-black background to highly pleasing artistic effect.

The music, I suppose, might at first resemble any other late-period Merzbow workout with its clinical, razor-sharp digitally-rendered clashing crystalline noise-explosions. I would prefer to read each sonic episode as varying portraits of the Frog, revealing every possible aspect of these strange Battrachian beasts. As the sound peels away the layers of cold, clammy skin and reveals the muscular structure, the skeletal framework, the nervous system, the lights, liver and lungs, and the microscopic detail of the circulatory system. As tiny corpuscles of frog blood are pumped around its veins and arteries. These anatomical details are layered on top of one another in psychedelic planes – flashing images conveying a three-dimensional gestalt that shockingly reveals all the Frog's qualities in glorious surrealistic detail.

If the Frog represents any aspect of Masami's view on nature, it's that he sees all natural life as a powerhouse. The tiny humble Frog is exposed, through imaginative sonic reworkings, to be nothing less than a blazing super-nova of energy. This need not surprise us when we look at the realities of nature, and how even the smallest creature in God's kingdom are super-efficient, dynamic containers of life, processing chemistry and recycling energy in ways that mankind cannot even begin to emulate.

In this context, the fact that Merzbow has sampled a frog's croak and introduced it (briefly) as a single element into this exhilarating sonic firecracker is almost by the by – the puny sound the Frog makes is almost as naught compared to the teeming, near-dangerous life it carries around in its system. Yet even here, Masami has sympathetically amplified and expanded that simple, wimpy croak into something profound, menacing, black...and resounding with the ancient wisdom of the swamps whence this utterance is borne. An utterly astounding work...and that's based on only one listen!

ED PINSENT 18/09/2004
www.misanthropicagenda.com

Merzbow
24 Hours: A Day of Seals
UNITED KINGDOM DIRTER PROMOTIONS DPROMCD50 4 x CD BOX (2002)

We need also examine the Alien8 CD that has something to do with his private collection of ptarmigans, but first let's dive into the freezing cold wasteland of vast icy waters that comprises the mammoth 4-CD box set, *24 Hours: A Day of Seals*. This is some of Merzbow's best ever music and sounds concealed in one of the least prepossessing artworks yet beheld by mankind's eyes – but it was created, digitally, by the artist himself so one mustn't be too hasty to judge. Was released some 2-3 years ago so is likely completely unavailable, but these reviews are written not to encourage purchase of latest novelty from CD racks, rather to affirm cultural value of these significant contributions to world of recorded noise.

As stated, this collection recreates in sound an entire environment for arctic creatures to thrive inside, and places mankind / audience / listener directly in middle of hostile zones where we could not ordinarily survive – in freezing temperatures, and underwater for many hours, while buffeted by strange mammals and any number of huge, threatening ugly deep-sea fish. A teeming environment filled with life-forms which we cannot understand. Merzbow is one of the few naturalists to come close to conveying the utter alien-ness of animal life, or at least the way it can appear utterly alien to our ignorant minds. True, there is the great Chris Watson – whose documentary recordings of nature, many associated with award-winning BBC films, are matchless in their accuracy and daring when it comes to capturing sounds which we otherwise never normally hear. But Merzbow's triumph, I suggest, comes through his imaginative powers; through his steely, trance-like rhythms, and hard-edged digital punching sounds, he renders a complex, deep and three-dimensional hologram of a world that's large enough for us to get lost inside, and through an elaborate fantasy comes close to the truth of the wild spirit of natural life on earth.

Thus, to listen to this box set is to spend 200 minutes bumping your head against ice floes, while the icy water chills you to your marrow and the seals swimming around you or sunning themselves on a rock are about as

familiar and friendly as enormous furry reptiles; they are transformed into monsters, but splendid monsters, every bit as loveable as all the beasts portrayed in the Godzilla movies - Mothra, King Ghidora, et al – themselves twisted manifestations of a concern for the environment and nature as you could wish for. In my perfect universe, the movie *Destroy All Monsters* will one day be seen as the cinematic equivalent of *On The Origin of Species*.

The *Day of Seals* is likewise a portrait of nature as an unceasing, relentless arena of power and energy, where the teeming traffic in swimming seals is likened to the subway system in Tokyo. There's something eerily stark and vital in every sound on the whole set...as though that feeling of being a rainy Monday-morning commuter were made to last for the entire day. Not only the animals, but the entire environment of ice, water, islands, cliffs and whirlpools is brought into vivid relief by the music, creating an utterly compelling here-and-now, in the swim of it experience. Has there ever been a more sympathetic and compassionate statement on the shape of the geophysical planet? Immerse yourself in this box set and marvel at the wonders from around the four corners of the globe. Here be monsters.

ED PINSENT 18/09/2004
PO Box 61, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 8GA
dirter@enconahead.co.uk

Merzbow
Animal Magnetism
CANADA ALIEN8 RECORDINGS ALIENCD 38 (2003)

Another 'animal lover' special record, this one features cover photographs of rare black-feathered fowl in their semi-natural habitat (perhaps dwelling in comfort on Masami's own private farm) and music which showcases the beauty of farm birds and beasts in their element; for example the 'Super Sheep' of track 3 and the mighty Ptarmigan, celebrated at some length in the extraordinary fourth track, which might also reference the obscure Canadian progressive rock band of same name. Certainly the music exhibits Merzbow's avowed love of prog as well as extreme heavy metal, being produced entirely with a guitar and a computer. The title track races along with fantastical pulse-beats coursing through its veins, a scathing hiss-noise scalding its skin, and an endless loop of barking chatter grinding on in the background. One imagines Masami being swarmed with hordes of lizards, reptiles, birds and small furry beasts, much like the unfortunate man in the Kingdom of Tess in Edward Lear's poem 'The New Vestments'. Sampled animal cries are brought into play, adding their bleats, yawps and yammers in amazing looped patterns to the dense noise.

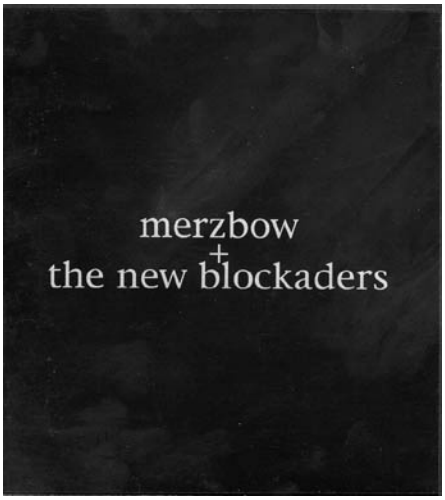
An interesting diversion is 'Quiet Men' – and who'd have thought you'd find a Merzbow track by that title? It's more suggestive of birds in the trees than men; said birds are gathered in a pretty gigantic flock, and their presence is magnified a thousand-fold, filmed at ten times normal camera speed, and printed on Super 8mm stock with a double or treble exposure. Hyperactive and intense, in short. At the start, this cut includes the electronic whinnying of 'crazy horses', joined swiftly by bestial voices from other parts of the menagerie - bleatings, gruntings and quackings…old MacMerzbow had a farm…even these domesticated beasts sound hideous in this context, terrifying in their animalistic beauty.

'Super Sheep' turns out to be something of a dozer, the sort of lazy overdriven rock-riff techno-beat swill that Masami does with great facility now (see, for example, the *Hard Lovin' Man* CD), but the next track 'A Ptarmigan' is indeed possessed of a dark and mysterious power. Starting with blue-black clouds and whipping itself up into a whirlwind of almighty weirdness, it seems to depict the wilderness of the Arctic life of one of these grouse-like avians, and could easily be read as an additional chapter to the *Day of Seals* saga. At over 23 minutes, this is the major track on this release and one of the most astonishing creations to have issued from Merzbow's digital imagination. 'Pier 39' is no turkey though, giving forth and effervescing with a truly gorgeous set of psychedelic acid-guitar riffs, and fuzzed-up digital guitars with their 'clean' punch breaking lots of bones in your face. Lovely chords, intense noise and weird far-out electronica patterns layering and weaving together with constant dynamic motion. Shockingly good CD. Merzbow does it again; even the label's claim is made good, 'we should be fully trusted with regard to our Merzbow releases.'

ED PINSENT 20/11/2004
www.alien8recordings.com

Various Frogspawn
Merzbow Frog Remixed and Revisited
USA MISANTHROPIC AGENDA MAR006 2 x CD (2003)

This turns out to be pretty pointless, and does not contain a sufficient amount of listening pleasure to warrant purchase. Is there much that can be done to remix the music of Merzbow? Why would anyone want to do it? Well, several people were persuaded they had something to add: there are some good A-list names here, including Pita, Fennesz and Hecker from the Mego gang; John Wiese, Russell Haswell, When; stoner rockers Sunn O))) and Boris; Hrvatski, Ulver, House of Low Culture and Terror Organ; and Gerritt, who runs the Misanthropic Agenda label in Houston. At two CDs, there's far too much of this sludgy, depressing noise to wade through; most of the reworkings have an undesirable ghostly effect, reflecting merely the faintest trace of the powerhouse strength of the original. Even the tracks which are loud and noisy seem wrong somehow; I can't put my finger on it, but the constituent parts have been put in the wrong order. It demonstrates, at least, that Merzbow's genius is not easily replicated, not even by musicians of this calibre. The package is fantastic,



coloured psychedelic circles in a fold-out die-cut sleeve. These concentric circles could be read as ripples…mere ripples in the pond where Merzbow's mighty frog lives. Which is pretty much what the music is too. A futile exercise and not much fun to listen to at all.

ED PINSENT
06/11/2004
www.misanthropicagenda.com

Merzbow + The New Blockaders
The Ten Foot Square Hut
UNITED KINGDOM HYPNAGOGIA GIA03 CD (2004)

An incredible slimline black box of magical noise-alchemy. This CD is one of two new products this season bringing forth Merzbow's highly imaginative reworkings of various 'bags' of noise/sound supplied by Richard Rupenus of The New Blockaders (TNB). Rupenus is the current reigning king of Nihilistic Wipe-out-everything Noise. Masami Akita is a long-time supporter of Rupenus, and rates the Bladder Flask LP as one of his firm favourites, which is saying something if you consider that said Flask LP was made when Rupenus was still a teenager.

The extent of Merzbow's transformative skills here are nothing short of miraculous. Across two tracks, helpfully labelled 'Transcience Part 1' and 'Transcience Part 2', Merzbow reinvigorates the inert, crumbling, bitter concrete noise-blocks of TNB into something utterly supercharged, dangerous, pro-active. On 'Part 1' he locks up the inner psychopath inside a steel-plated armoured car, equipped with laser cannons and explosives…this car can fly, travel underwater and run overland at 300mph…it's a soaring, surging, attack-mode beast!

The strange title might be the secret name for the Cold War laboratory where Merzbow and TNB conduct their home-made experiments, using materials from bottom of the garden. They may be concocting formulae for bombs made out of compost, using natural nitrates as explosives. Will lob them at the gates of the Embassy, shatter windows. All is contained within the slimline black box of the package. Gold lettering, gold printed insert, artwork by Masami. A box of cigars, exploding cigars.

'Transcience Part 2' is in some ways rather different to the soaring, pulsing monstrosity that immediately preceded it…it starts with recognisable explosions, then brings in a grating, hideous blanket of barbs and spiky textures, wrapping the listener in sheer liquid death. Some respite; to escape the evil dive-bombing attack machine, only to face this painful doom. One must be grateful that Merzbow doesn't design weapons systems for arms manufacturers.

There has been in my estimation a certain non-imagistic, non-specific, completely abstract 'template' associated with the works of TNB. If such a template exists, Merzbow does retain it here, yet somehow turns the smothering nihilism of the original into an energy, a dynamic forward-moving force. Compare this with his 'animal kingdom' suites discussed above. Unlike those, there is no attempt here to depict reality…it's simply howling noise for its own howling sake. Can't say it enough, but the way the raw materials have been transformed into such dynamic music is quite magical. A resounding success, and for my money arguably even better than the 10" LP below…

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004
www.hypnagogia.org.uk

Merzbow and The New Blockaders
Oumagatoki
UNITED KINGDOM HYPNAGOGIA NAG03 10" VINYL LP (2004)

A most 'grabbable' 10-inch vinyl artyfact, companion piece to above CD. The cover artwork by Masami Akita, drawn in mock-traditional Japanese style, depicts the untamed spirits of the air as hostile demons disguised as clouds, passing over a village below; this matches the powerful sounds bellowing on disc, layered digital renderings of gusts, gales, howling winds, tornadoes, cataracts and hurricanoes. Merzbow, treating Rupenus sound sources, again exhibits masterful control of these selected, stripped-gear engine and soaring air elements, grinding and clashing them together like irregular-shaped cams on a huge, multi-dimensional lathe device. Edition of 400 copies only.

ED PINSENT 30/10/2004
www.hypnagogia.org.uk

Merzbow / Pan Sonic
V
CANADA VICTO 089 CD (2003)

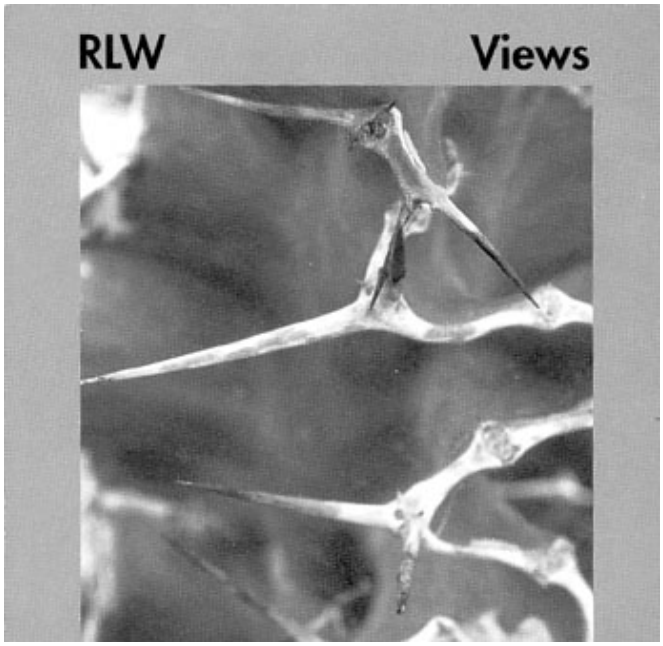
Pan Sonic must not yet have read those reviews of that live Merzbow / Jazzkammer CD released in 2001 or they might have thought twice about taking on the King of Noise themselves. Or perhaps they did see the reviews or heard the warnings but decided to power on nevertheless. After all, who would pass up the chance to outplay Merzbow at his own game? So take him on Vainio and Väisänen did, and now we have the result on CD by courtesy of the cutely named Les Disques Victo so we may judge how well V and V fared against His Royal Merzness.

It's a long performance, clocking in at 68 minutes, and really not all that noisy apart from the last 10 minutes; there are quite long passages of quiet if not exactly soothing sound punctuated by bursts of sandstorm from time to time. Our friends break no new ground in sonic exploration or torture as the case may be and the sound tends to be quite steely throughout. The wet flubby noises I recall from Pan Sonic's first album from way back when are nowhere to be found and the distinctive rhythms that help characterise the duo's brand of noisy minimalist electronica appear only towards the end. A superficial listen would suggest that overall our man Akita dominates, yet on closer inspection his noise is very streamlined and controlled, implying an influence at work. It seems Pan Sonic have got the idea of how to play with Merzbow effectively, for themselves at least: they play along with him subtly and, from the 30th minute to the 40th, support his noise blasts with delicate rhythmic touches. There are times when Pan Sonic appear to take the lead and then Akita flits around the edges adding little touches of that special Merzbow magic to spice up proceedings here and there.

Maybe this live outing isn't the best performance either Merzbow or Pan Sonic have done and one would have preferred a more compact and dense display of noise / electronic pyrotechnics. Parts of the recording are enjoyable and the musical landscape can be subtle, even a bit mysterious. I'm happy to report there were no major casualties and nobody's special magic or secret recipe with the secret herbs and spices was ruined. Now let's see, who else is game for a live encounter with Merzbow? ... shall we pick on Ultrasonic Wave Attack Pestrepeller?

JENNIFER HOR
www.victo.qc.ca

RLW♦Ralf Wehowsky



RLW
Views
USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM27 CD (2003)

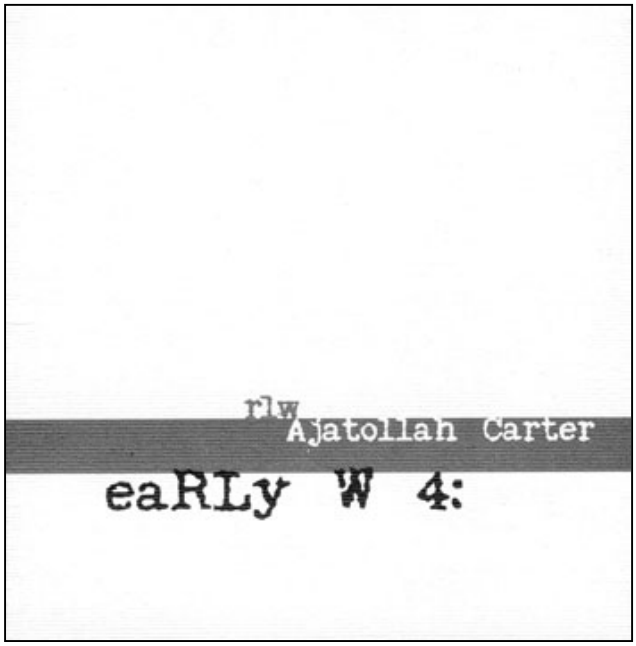
A recent one from Ralf Wehowsky, everyone's favourite radical German experimenter. It comprises four new instrumental improvisations by Ralf, later reconstructed by process of 'spontaneous mix' in the studio. Frankly, I found it heavy going, but RLW's never been an easy one to digest; arguably, his work today is still as truculent and tough-minded as his 1980s experiments, impossible for polite society to assimilate. When you hear the music of P16.D4 used as a soundtrack for a Vauxhall TV commercial, let me know…

#1 of these untitled tracks is the strongest one, a massive electronic construction. It's a sprawling semi-mechanical hissing type of thing, an android hydra that spits flames and emits gas. This work exhibits a cavernous vastness that few electronic-dabblers in the modern age could even conceive, let alone dare to build. RLW did it with a tone generator, customised according to his particular needs; instead of a keyboard, it requires wheels to play it. When it was delivered to his private chateau in Neuschwanstein, he had it retuned to a weird tuning system; a crew from the local motorcycle repair garage was employed. 'I couldn't believe the response I was getting from my tone generator by the time those grease-monkeys had finished with it,' gloats RLW. He's not kidding. This intense workout is more like mechanical engineering than music…think of a cauldron or samovar filled with motor oil and old rusty metal nuts and bolts, and a small outboard motor engine inside said cauldron, churning up a sluggish ocean.

Views takes a downward turn from here on. #2 sees RLW fiddling about with toys and bits of junk; nothing wrong with doing that, but he sees fit to record the activity and requires that we listen to it. 'Musical actions in the recording room,' my ass! Aimless creaking and clanging, more like…#3 is equally unprepossessing, using wind-up music boxes and an electric toothbrush. You can hear him winding up these fiddly little boxes, banging them about, and squeezing them in his fists to vary the sound they make – from which he gets a wah-wah sound that Jimi Hendrix fans will be amazed by. It livens up slightly after some 5 minutes, with help of studio processing (backwards tapes?) to enter a more 'weird' zone, but still can't get past this half-baked, sketchy quality.

Well, so far this is like musical therapy for the mentally ill…no doubt, this is all part of RLW's agenda to undermine traditional uses for objects and subvert traditional music forms. This way, he secretly plans to overthrow the earth. He's overthrown me already…mostly through sheer boredom. #4, the final track, uses elements from all the three proceeding experiments, and does a whole lot more as well. This one is stronger, with a more intensive feedback-noise opening, and generally has a lot more going on – most noticeably the addition of electric guitars, which helps considerably. One sometimes forgets that the guitar is Ralf's instrument – well, sort of…I wonder if he would consider making a go-for-broke guitar hero avant-rock LP? But he's probably far too 'anti' everything to do that. Not that he's a nihilistic nasty guy, but he's just too ethical to do anything other than give us music that is 'good' for us, simply because it's so challenging.

ED PINSENT 09/10/2004
PO Box 22195, Seattle, WA 98122-0195, USA
www.anomalousrecords.com



RLW
eaRLy W 4: Ajatollah Carter
GREECE ETIDIONS_ZERO #6 CD (2004)

The third release in this series must have passed me by; the first two I've already got, LPs on the Swill Radio label. Those were both reissues of existing material from very limited cassette issues, but the tracks here are mostly being compiled for the first time. All taken from one year (1980), these 20 cuts reveal aspects in the life of RLW's hyper-active band PD, the group that mutated into P16.D4. They all feature various combinations of seven other mad noisy Germans looning it up with Ralf. Every outpouring of these cheerful zanies has been scrupulously documented, with little leaflet insert telling you everything you could possibly want to know about all 20 tracks; only Psychic TV or Throbbing Gristle, with their recent reissue programmes, come close to matching such thoroughness.

The music here might appeal to fans of music from 'that' period, including such as The Pop Group, Throbbing Gristle, Metal Urbain or Der Plan – the latter I don't really know as well as I ought, but PD did once

spontaneously take over that band's synth set-up on a live gig, an anecdotal fragment which might help to situate this collection for you. Otherwise, it's mostly for diehard fans. Poorly recorded; plenty of clunky Dr Rhythm beats and dreadful drumming, ugly hissing synths, clumsy bass thwacks, mangled guitars, and all vocals either chanted, declaimed or shouted rather than 'sung'. Primitive post-punk mayhem, done by knowing intellectuals.

ED PINSENT 13/10/2004

RLW
Tonlose Lieder
JAPAN PARA DISC PACD013 CD (2004)

A reet tasty collection of busy and unusual noises, direct from the man's personal archives; besides matching solo noisemakers like Koji Asano for volume of output, he must save copies of virtually everything he ever does. This CD is packed with what he terms 'sketchbook' materials and comes from 1990-1991 period in his artistic career. This is of note because it's the period between the end of P16.D4 (defunct 1989) and the beginning of RLW's solo recordings. Mostly improvised, all instrumentals, and filled with lively edits; every piece here is short and inconsequential, but certainly nothing lacks for artistic 'moment'. The most effective are the queer-sounding, worrying and slightly-scary mood-pieces, which with their gothic chords and sense of menace work very as intended gothic horror movie soundtracks. But there's tons of variety – drum machine bop music, rock guitar solos shredded and fragmented, and plenty more. Realised with the help of certain friends and collaborator, mostly solo.

ED PINSENT 17/11/2004
56 Benkeiishi-cho, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8082, Japan
www.parallaxrecords.jp

RLW
Points of Reference
USA PERDITION PLASTICS PER011 CD [2002]

I like this one – a typically RLW skewed take on how to render electro-acoustic music. There are plenty of nature sounds abounding, extremely abstracted – or artificial sounds that resemble field recordings; the crackling sound (like walking through dry leaves) is a singularly effective piece of chugging trundling noise. There are also talking voices, mutilated and filtered, and the voices of babies gurgling, one of which is like babbling brooks. This release is something to do with 'sound as a psychological platform' and is intended to put listener into some sort of position, obliging us to figure where we stand in relation to what we hear. An orientation course, if you will. There are further notes about sonic 'map making' in booklet courtesy of his friend and collaborator Bruce Russell, but these observations are far too deep for me. With this very developed form of music which RLW was working on in 1996-1998 (you have only to compare it with the 1991 sketchbook work above), he was achieving a fascinating form of heavy abstraction, at times harsh, slow and generally mysterious, part music, part noise. The static-filled drones are vaguely evil, silent lurking shapes. This kind of submerged noise, with hints of geographic exploration and very faint traces of static and radio activity audible, shades into the turf once occupied by Bernhard Günter, C M Von Hausswolff, and (up to a point) Disinformation, although the latter no longer seems to be quite so productive.

ED PINSENT 17/11/2004

ALSO AVAILABLE:

P.D.
Inweglos
GREECE ABSURD #40 CD (ND)

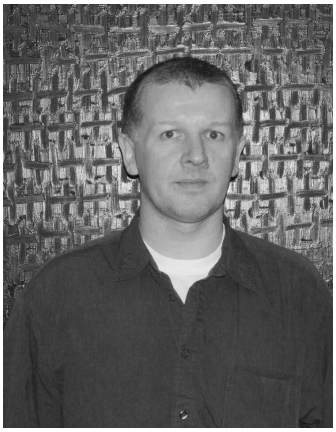
A reissue of a 1980 LP, now with four bonus tracks. Includes 'Progressive Disco I' and 'Progressive Disco II'. Zounds.

P16.D4
Wer Nicht Arbeiten Will Soll Auch Nicht Essen!
GERMANY WSDP 017 VINYL LP (ND)

Seems to be a reissue of Wahrnehmunen W011, originally released in 1981. Includes 'Nippon', 'Es Lebe Jean C.' and 'Tanzmusik'. Gadzooks.

LEAP-SECONDS

Leap-Seconds are a duo of English improvisers, Neil Robinson and Peter Blundell. Their recent releases *Hints* and *Atomic Time* suggested they might have a very clear idea of what they wanted their music to achieve. Interview took place by Email in November 2004. Pictures by Cherry Blundell.



EP Are you interested in the so-called American Minimalists, and have they influenced what you do at all?

LS Terry Riley, La Monte Young and Charlemagne Palestine are more relevant than say Steve Reich or Phillip Glass for the reason that their limited approach in many cases seems more mediated through improvisation rather than a fixed compositional framework. The music of Morton Feldman is also worth mentioning although he is not generally referred to as a minimalist and is a composer as well, his music seems to express a great deal with very little and he has an equal affinity with the space and time that the sound occupies as well as the sound itself.

EP Would you describe your work as a very 'English' approach to minimalism?

LS If this in some ways refers in some way to a cultural sensibility that one innately possesses through one's ethnicity that informs the music, then it is perhaps too subjective to qualify. On the other hand if one is referring to a tradition of 'English Minimalism' if such a thing exists that might include figures like Brian Eno or Gavin Bryars, then there is probably little affiliation to such a tradition.

EP What was the thinking behind limiting yourself to playing so few instruments - for example a string bass and an electric bass?

LS There are a number of ways this question can be interpreted:

a) Leap-Seconds is a duo so generally there are two instruments playing together and as overdubs are not used because there is an interest in the real-time performance, only two instruments are heard on the recordings.

b) The instrumentation used across all the performances to date is related to the process of choosing the resources that are available and making the most of them and of course exercising a degree of authority over them. When one exhausts their use then perhaps it is time to re-assess their role in the music and maybe the direction of the music itself. All creativity involves limitations being imposed in some way and of course such limitations don't necessarily make the music itself limited.

c) Some performances have incorporated the alternation and switching between instruments in a real-time situation, this method requires caution and relates to the above comment about choosing/exhausting your materials in the appropriate manner.

To conclude, if a performance is deemed to be of merit regardless of the instrumentation and/or how it is used then it will be treated as such.

EP Is there a systematic approach to your playing actions? Once you select a specific playing method, you seem to stick to it for the length of each piece without any deviation. Is that deliberate?

LS In response to the former part of the question, there are sometimes loose compositional frameworks that refer to how an instrument 'should' be played, this is usually born out of discussion about the desired direction of a piece. 7'25 from Atomic Time for example was an exercise in trying to sustain a single and continuous tone for as long as possible, it of course failed, but the failure itself took on its own form that in itself had merit irrespective of whether it was intended. A systematic approach is necessary in a provisional way, but not as gospel. Sometimes it is good to interrogate the logic of an idea in your mind through its execution rather than simply trying to replicate it in an appropriate action.

With regards to the latter part of the question, Leap-Seconds has developed towards this very restrictive space where the use of a few elements seems to command huge consequence, it appears a very minimum amount of change is all that is possible, often the rewards have come through restraint rather than excess, but that is not to say there isn't any deviation in this music, it depends in part on how one listens.

EP What is your interest in Atomic Time? Can the idea be explained to someone non-scientific like myself?

LS We are not scientists either but historically, time has been measured in terms of the Earth's rotation (Solar Time) but this rotation is not sufficiently uniform to provide an accurate standard. Due to the braking action of tides, the Earth is constantly undergoing a deceleration as it spins round thus the duration taken for it to complete one complete rotation is not constant but by measuring the vibration of atoms (in the element caesium 133) we can more accurately reckon time.

EP Has Atomic Time influenced the structures of your works?

LS Within the narrow parameters that we set ourselves to work, one could say that we are looking at the 'grain' of sound under a microscope in much the same way that time can be calibrated at the atomic level. However, in order for the texture inherent in the sounds to be brought out (harmonics, resonant frequencies etc.,) the material needs to be worked on over relatively long periods of time as opposed to the infinitesimally small lengths of atomic time.

EP Do you use scores, compositional methods, or improvise everything?

LS As we are for the most part improvising musicians, we do not use any form of musical scoring (conventional or graphic notation) as this hinders the quite often intuitive nature of the music. However we do employ compositional strategies to guide us, for example using quiet, loud sounds, high or low notes, specific intervals determined beforehand. Although these methods are very simple, they are usually the strongest as aids to our improvising. □

Indang Pariaman

Introduction

A whole bunch of releases pouring out from this cornucopia-like Seattle label, offering music galore and even DVD footage captured from many exotic Eastern lands. Sun City Girl Alan Bishop appears to be masterminding this programme, putting out on CD musical materials stashed in private cassette collections and archives for 20-odd years. At least one of the CDs below was issued in 1994 on their own Majorca label. Alan and his brother Rick Bishop are American-Lebanese who have travelled extensively in the far East, Asia, Indonesia, Burma…and have no end of hair-raising tales to tell. Rick Bishop, when asked to contribute to the fourth issue of *Halana* magazine, wrote a wild and hairy travel essay describing his exploits in the Far East and North Africa that would curl the hair of most sensible people. 'The farther I get away from any known safeguards,' he wrote in 1998, 'the more brilliant, and intense, the experience becomes.' The Bishops purposefully seek out unexplored, off-map, unknown territories wherever they go, brushing aside notions of conventional 'tourism' with obvious contempt for the timid and weak holiday-makers, those poor deluded fools who think they've seen the reality of foreign countries. Language and cultural barriers present no obstacle to these intrepid explorers in their quest for novelty and excitement, and they laugh in the face of potentially life-threatening dangers.

Voraciously collecting records, or tapes made off local radios in their travels, the Bishops have now assembled a mind-boggling array of 'droning beat pop, pseudo-gypsy songs, jungle folk trance and other improbably traditional and hybrid styles, heard only by a handful of outsiders'. And that's just a description of the Sumatra CD! There's no denying these things are great fun to listen to, and I speak as one whose travels have rarely taken him outside of the safety of European and American cities; and lacking any real understanding of the foreign climes in question I feel ill-equipped to appraise the musical value of these releases. That said, my two main reservations with entire project so far: 1) sense of musical and cultural one-upmanship on part of the Bishops; as if to say, our travels abroad are scarier than yours, and our record collections are weirder. Undoubtedly they are correct, You win all the marbles, lads. 2) nagging feeling that the primary impulse is not to educate, rather to startle – or even shock – Western listeners with music that is completely unfamiliar to them. Both of these reservations tend to be backed up by the lurid, colourful packaging of these releases, which is long on dazzling imagery, short on solid contextual information. But if you want documented examples of authentic music backed up by solid research from ethno-musicological scholars, then you know where to look. Rest of you, dip in and enjoy yourselves…(EP) 06/10/2004

Various Artists
Folk and Pop Sounds of Sumatra Vol. 1
USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES
SF001 CD [2003]

Jolly record…bound to appeal to lovers of (real) pop music everywhere; songs from Marios Group, Pimip Rubiah, Samsimar and Haba Haba Group, recorded when I know not. What kind of pop music? Western forms are borrowed, there are strange melodies, sung in foreign tongues, but otherwise perfectly formed with tight, lush arrangements that make this disc a delight. My favourite here is 'Indang Pariaman' by Samsimar; it has a tricky rhythmical structure that Westerners would find impossible to play, and a detached perfection in the cracked, slightly world-weary vocal delivery, which sings an impossible melody that sounds as though it's been woven like a carpet rather than composed. Hard to resist that, and it might be evidence of an interesting crossover mixture of traditional musical forms with Western pop music, but that's a wild guess. 'Piso Sumalim' is a piece in the 'drama' style, and features a weird rooster-crowing sound (played on a musical instrument) interrupting, at regular intervals, a dialogue in unknown tongue. There are groans, screams and piteous wails…could be a major tragedy afoot here. Sleeve is adorned with far-out, highly colourful images which could be movie stills, or posters, folk in unusual dress.

ED PINSENT 06/10/2004

Various Artists
Princess Nicotine: Folk and Pop Music of Myanmar (Burma) Vol 1
USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES
SF006 CD

'Listen, and be amazed!' is exhortation of Alan Bishop attached to this one…the sixth release in the series certainly has plenty of the wow-factor that is probably hoped for. The musical fireworks on offer appear to have been selected primarily for their capacity to startle and amaze the average Western listener. Princess Nicotine contains some very beautiful and entertaining recordings that impress by the strangeness of their melodic line and intervals, the jaw-dropping pop music arrangements, staggering prowess of musicians playing weird-sounding instruments which clash with more familiar ones, with everything played at speeds that defy rational belief. Plus, the CD is sequenced with virtually no pauses at index points, so that everything comes at you in one mad rush and keeps excitement level at max.

From what I can glean with my ears alone, this appears to be some species of pop music, rather than ethnic recordings; there is a lot of studio echo, overdubs, arrangements. I wonder how Burmese Pop came about, and why. I like 'Jasmine Bush of Gold', a song by Burma Thein Than. Simply gorgeous acoustic guitar work, with a slightly echoed voice, and a melody played on heaven knows what kind of flute. Sensual and sensuous music. Mar Mar Aye's 'Someday he will return' is also remarkable.

'How do they do it?' gushes Alan Bishop's sleeve note. 'Are they smarter? Are they better? How can it be ignored or denied?' He goes on to chastise the so-called experts in the field of ethno-musicology who have for so long ignored this 'awe-inspiring musical legacy' of Myanmar (ie Burma). So, perhaps the mission of Sublime Frequencies is to correct this injustice? This sampler, like the others in the series, is intended to 'bring us up to speed' and intrigue us enough to investigate further. But as to contextual information (dates? Original recordings? Regions? Narrative meaning? Translations?) it seems that nobody's really interested in providing that. We're told however that the selection comes from the past 50 years of recorded music. Parts of this CD were originally issued on the Majorca label in 1994, and it includes music by Mar Mar Aye, Bo Sein, Tonte Theintan and many more.

ED PINSENT 10/10/2004

Various Artists
Night Recordings from Bali
USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES
SF003 CD

A further Bishop / Cain recording escapade from 1989. Spurning the 'tourist industry' version of Balinese Gamelan, the pair of them set out to seek the 'lesser-known, darker side of Balinese life'. They did so at night, acting like commando raiders. The CD comprises these secret Gamelan rehearsals and recordings, combined with other music like flute and drum folk tunes; open-air village theatre performances; and field recordings of the forest, like the heavy atmosphere captured on 'Monkey Forest Night'. Quite a varied and impressive package this one; there's a DVD of the same title, which may have been recorded at the same time; and the inescapable presence of the 'night demons' is never very far away. Less sensationalist in tone than the others in this series, yet Night Recordings From Bali still couldn't hack it as an academic World Music recording, as it still lacks in-depth contextual detail. Presumably this is just the sort of thing to induce apoplexy in fans of the work of Steven Held, or Mickey Hart's 'The World' CD series…

ED PINSENT 10/11/2004

Various Artists
Radio Palestine: Sounds of the Eastern Mediterranean
USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES
SF008 CD

Along with *Radio Morocco* and *Radio Java*, this one's a very interesting collection of radio-collage episodes, made by Alan Bishop in 1985, using recordings he made on journeys through Egypt and Jerusalem. Filled with surprises, each segment gives us fragments of recorded music, news broadcasts, adverts, static, station

identifications, all selected from different times and locations and edited together to create endlessly fascinating listening experiences. A kind of eastern-styled People Like Us fast-edit approach, although Bishop isn't into 'layering' – he lets each selection speak for itself. Surely these suggest the whirlwind of travel adventure as undertaken by Mr Bishop…sensation is bolstered by the recounting in sleeve note of a surprising tale of hospitality from a complete stranger in Haifa, where (on word of mouth alone) he stayed as an honoured guest for a week and was showered with pleasures and sensual delights that only a prince can dream of. The intriguing titles include 'Tangental Psychedelico', 'Ramadan with Crowbar', and 'Exploding Briefcases of Cairo'. Unlike other SF releases, no attempt whatsoever is made to explain anything. Add an amazing sleeve filled with collages of picture postcards and similar popular sources, and you have one of the strongest in the series I'd say.

ED PINSENT 23/10/2004

Various Artists
I Remember Syria
USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES
SF009 2 x CD (2004)

This one is a double CD set, kind of an aural diary compiled by Mark Gergis in the Syrian Arab Republics, during 1998 and 2000. It's pretty dull; there are radio snatches, traffic sounds, street sounds, overheard conversations, phone conversations, all of which are of stupefying inanity. It's a jumble of boring detritus and doesn't make any sense; doesn't even make the country appear interesting, which takes some doing.

ED PINSENT 07/11/2004

Various Artists
Radio Morocco
USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES
SF007 CD

Another Alan Bishop compilation, this one made in 1983 when he was in this part of Africa and made taped excerpts from Radio Tangier International. A strong and intriguing radio collage; according to Bishop himself, it's 'some of the greatest music ever known

displayed here amidst snippets of news, commercials, radio noise and a host of other-worldly transmissions'.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2004

Various Artists
Radio Java
USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES
SF002 CD

Another Alan Bishop radio collage, with the help of Manford Cain. This one from 1989. Includes 'spooky theatre extracts', pop music, rock music, disco music, folk music, radio commercials, DJ announcements, the usual. A deliberately contrived non-linear clashing of cultural information. The weird cross-fades make this one distinctly disorienting.

ED PINSENT 09/11/2004

Various Artists
Cambodian Cassette Archives: Khmer Folk and Pop Music Vol. 1
USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES
SF011 CD (2004)

Compared with *Cambodian Rocks* (Parallel World) which I reviewed in TSP#12, this

compilation of Cambodian pop music of the 1970s onwards tends to emphasise less boppy, less Westernised and more 'exotic'-sounding pieces. This does not come as a surprise to me as the collection was compiled by Mark Gergis of Mono Pause which in its Southeast Asian pop music guise of Neung Phak (Thai for 'Mono Pause') released a self-titled album of MOR-ish songs that would be quite at home in Asian restaurants or clubs in middle class suburbs of Western cities or country towns: the sort of places where the only Asian faces you see are of those running the joints. The compilation, culled from cassettes held at a Californian public library, may possibly reflect something of Gergis's tastes in Southeast Asian pop music though I might add here that public libraries' collections of foreign or ethnic music, especially if it is popular music, aren't necessarily the best examples of such music. Indeed, a number of tracks on this compilation plod a fair bit and there's little of the sense of playful and knowing fun that makes *Cambodian Rocks* (Parallel World) such a cult classic. (In case you're wondering why I must qualify the record reviewed in TSP#12 with its label, I believe there are 2 CDs also called *Cambodian Rocks* released by the Khmer Rocks label in the early part of 2004.)

Apart from the Khmer lyrics, the music and even some of the instrumentation on *Cambodian Cassette Archives* ... aren't far removed from the Chinese pop kitsch my father used to play in his restaurant in Gladesville (a middle class suburb in Sydney if you have to know); one cassette he had boasted a pop song featuring Deep Purple's famous 'Smoke on the Water' riff (and sung by a woman) which finds its parallel in one lite-metal track on the Sublime Frequencies release. Considering that Cambodian / expat Khmer pop music these days is a huge cash cow with labels galore trying to capitalise on it, and Sublime Frequencies is putting out CD compilations of ethnic music at a rate that makes Tzadik look a bit miserly, you may as well pass over this particular CD - unless of course you're doing a music selection for the public library that employs you.

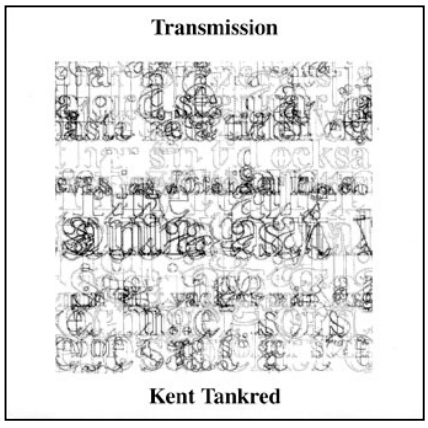
JENNIFER HOR

PO Box 17971, Seattle, WA 98127, USA
www.sublimefrequencies.com

SWEDISH SOUND ART

At least four or five new CDs from the Firework Edition label have landed here this issue, along with printed matter. Last ish, we had a batch of oddities from same label, many of which had a 'conceptual notion' underpinning the music. I'm beginning to wonder if this isn't part of some larger conceptual scheme, involving the power of suggestion; each capsuled description of the work was designed to pre-determine your response to the art, before you even played the thing. To put it more plainly, is someone pulling our leg? There are at least two common patterns to this scheme emerging – and I wonder if we can attribute it mostly to Leif Elggren. The first FER notion is that human voices can somehow be 'hidden' in unexpected sound sources. There's another available manifestation of that idea, the CD called *The Object*, where The Sons of God tried to find hidden voices in an old metal trawler from the sea by banging it with hammers. The second FER notion is that something interesting will happen – listener will gain some form of payoff – but *only* if you listen to the whole CD. As some of them are 70 minutes of sheer uninterrupted monotony, this might not appear a very tempting prospect. Now it's 2004, and here come the same notions again, only this time the 'concepts' are even more risible than last year's, what's more the records don't even sound particularly interesting! I'll go along with a gag up to a point if the noise in question is worthwhile; frankly, even my limits are being tested now. (EP)

ANLA COURTIS



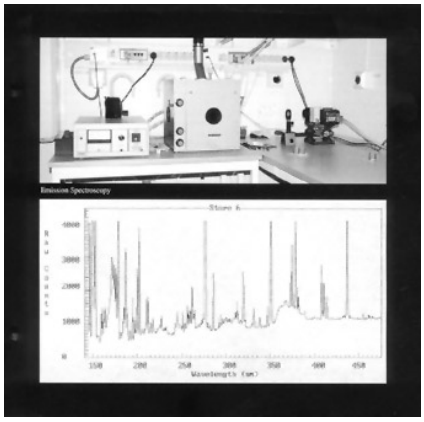
Kent Tankred

Transmission

SWEDEN FIREWORK EDITION RECORDS FER 1045 CD (2003)

Kent Tankred is our first such Swede; he's one half of The Sons of God with Leif Elggren, has made decent racket in past and here we get five tracks of vaguely troubling droney-noise. Luckily, there's no pretentious concept to mar enjoyment of this one, although it's still undoubtedly solemn. 'Pluck' sounds like a disembodied church organ, inside a ghostly church; the organ itself seems to be mutating into some other object of wood and metal. 'In the gap' seems to document the sound of a crippled frog attempting to crawl out of a deep well. Not too promising so far, but 'Inundation' isn't too bad; it hints at a vaguely industrial sound, like the massed noise of factories on overtime, manufacturing some wholly useless consumer product. Strangely, so etiolated is the loosely-grinding effect of this track, that it suggests a man moving backwards in time, and doing so at an accelerated rate. The original recordings, whatever they were, have had all of their force sapped from them. The fourth track, 'When I put…', has the same sensation of being over-processed; clearly hundreds of recorded layers have fed into the finished product, with the result that you can hardly 'hear' any of it. Curiously flat and narrow, like most of this CD; the more Kent adds to his work, the more subtracted it becomes. A printed exhortation on the sleeve insists that music be played loud; it's usually a bad sign when something like this appears. Such a message can be decoded to mean 'dear listener, please compensate for my lack of good ideas by using the volume control, and perhaps you won't notice.' 'Suffering' is the name of the last track, and believe me if you made it this far, you will be…

ED PINSENT 27/09/2004



Leif E Boman

Ge.Nos 0911b

SWEDEN FIREWORK EDITION RECORDS FER 1046 CD (2003)

Our second FER release. Leaving aside the fact that this entire CD is simply 60 minutes of completely tedious electronic drivel, it contains an idea can only be a complete hoax. It starts with the premise that 'voices…must be hidden in ashes and concrete dust'. No case is made to back up this statement which is issued flatly on sleevenote, as though nobody in right mind could possibly disagree

with it. Text continues without pausing for breath as though you already believe it, and explains further. The artist apparently took a handful of ashes and dust, and using the techniques of 'Emission Spectroscopy', proceeded to extract sounds from this inert material. (How?) Using photos and text, the package starts to create an impression in your mind that scientific methods actually exist to perform this (completely impossible) experiment. The impression – and it's no more than that – is bolstered with references to instruments, technicians, and the University where it allegedly took place.

There's more. The ashes and concrete dust in question were taken from the site of the World Trade Centre, the ground-zero site of the wrecked twin towers. Now, without admitting to it, this plays directly on our fears of death, our most morbid preoccupations; what is suggested is that when we play this record, we'll hear the voices of people dying. At this point Boman's suggestion turns the fantasy from something silly and weird into something, well, morally despicable.

The resulting computer-processed noise is not worth the bother. It resembles 2 or 3 static-blasting transistor radios stuck inside a goldfish bowl. None of this morbid death-fantasy content is detectable, and all the evidence starts to point to Boman perpetrating a childish prank at everyone's expense. Note that this label also supports the work of Friedrich Jürgenson, the obsessive and pseudo-scientific freak who was convinced he was capturing voices of the dead on his tape recorder; to the extent that they've issued an English-language copy of his autobiography. This too is filled with the same specious arguments, omission of facts, and deceptive turns of phrase to sucker in the naïve reader. Are these people at Firework Edition obsessed with the voices of the dead? Why not pay some attention to voices of the living, for a change?

ED PINSENT 28/09/2004

Henrik Rylander
Formation
SWEDEN FIREWORK EDITION RECORDS FER 1047 CD (2003)

One of the few FER releases this issue not to go overboard in favour of dropping hints as to its 'cryptic meaning' subtexts, notwithstanding the stark message 'I HEAR VOICES' which appears on CD tray. Rylander pukes up nine tracks of dirty, monotonous and heavy electric noise, fuzzed-up and foul. No titles; first one is a bumpy rhythmic ride in the Hell-Disco, while the second one hammers your head in the Hell-Factory, stamping out die-cut impressions of your face to be shipped to the Hell-Pet Food refinery. All relentless, barbaric, and monotonous to point of tedium… enlivened only by the sense of a stern conviction carried within that 'iron' sound. As far as can be made out by the dim light cast by this racket, it's all done by feedback forced through computer programs (why ain't it on MEGO?). Every other track's got some sort of a 'beat'…although you may feel it's more like a 'beating', after which you feel pretty 'beat up'. An hour's worth of such pummelling may get a bit boring, but it is verging on solid sub-bass rock music, only slightly let down by the insistent regularity of its rhythmic patterns.

ED PINSENT 06/10/2004

Leif Elggren
Virulent Images / Virulent Sound
SWEDEN FIREWORK EDITION RECORDS FER 1044 CD (2003)

The final example, I hope, in the latest batch of silly releases from Firework Edition. This is the CD that dares to ask the following question: 'If images can virulent, can sound be virulent too?' The CD purports to contain 'micro recordings of eight different samples' of highly potent viruses'. The front cover states that simply looking at the image of a virus, will spread the virus too.

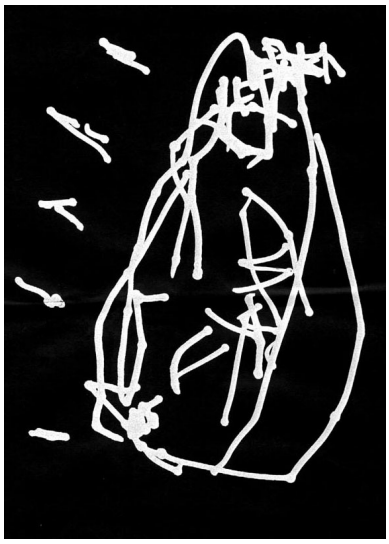
If you've followed this line of thought so far, you can see a connection with the 'rubble' recordings above. Once again, your reviewer is reluctantly drawn into a trap where I have to write something that helps explain the 'idea', rather than engage with the music. All I can guess is that this wearisome nonsense is intended as some sort of metaphor for the way that modern art and culture spreads like a micro-organism, communicating through contact with host operators and agents, ie other human beings, through the carriers of our sensory organs – eyes and ears.

Unfortunately, Leif Elggren has no substance whatsoever in his art to back this up with. The sound of this dreary recording, if you want to know, is 8 interminable and insufferable episodes of pointless, inert, electronic grumbling. What a waste of time…I gather Fylkingen is sponsored to the hilt with government money to promote Swedish culture. Leif, why not spend that money on something worthwhile instead of absurd ego-trips like this?

ED PINSENT 30/10/2004

Firework Edition: Sigfridsvägen 6, 126 50 Hägersten, Sweden
www.fireworkeditionrecords.com

And see STEN HANSON in the ART GALLERY section



The Discurator's DEN

Various Organists
Spire: Organ Works Past Present + Future
UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TONE 20 2 x CD (2004)

Only a two-CD set? This compilation feels even grander in scope that that somehow, attributable perhaps not just to the quantity and variety of music, but also to the depth and scope of the ideas it strives to convey. It's all organ music, mostly music played on the church organ where available, although other organs (Hammonds, for example, or even hand-made instruments similar to organs) are permissible; and so are ideas about organs, and soundworks that use air, because air is what makes a church organ work in the first place…but we're getting ahead of ourselves. The comp features names drawn from the current roster of artists signed to the Touch label, plus guest names, and long-standing associates such as Leif Elggren who also supplied assistance from the EMS Studio in Stockholm.

Touch label boss Mike Harding has a history of 'themed' samplers, going back to the Touch Travel cassettes of the mid-1980s and recent CDs released in the 1990s, oblique statements that survey the state of the world and report back through music, sound-art, and mini-essays. He continues to credit his audience with intelligence, and a hunger for ideas. Harding had been thinking about an organ compilation for some time, drawing up in his mind a wide-ranging brief that would encompass music played on that instrument, or music inspired by it, or even simply influenced by it. The finished comp displays a wide variety of interpretations, and/or solutions to the brief…playing an actual church organ, or recording it in imaginative ways, or even investigating the effects of its sounds on the human psyche.

In the condensed texts provided, Harding delivers up a potted history of said instrument, while not hesitating to get in a few digs at the established church, and indeed the organ's 'highly political uses'; the latter is illustrated by Leif Elggren's track, but it seems that the whole compilation has an agenda that posits this far-from-humble instrument squarely within the bounds of 'the establishment'. True, the organ is an expensive instrument, therefore usually built exclusively in 'establishment' places associated with lots of money, like churches, cathedrals, town halls, universities and such like; but then again, you could say the same about early electronic instruments. There's one line of thought that says early moogs and instruments for computer music were 'co-opted' by universities and academic music establishments (they were, at first, the only places who could afford to buy them), effectively ensuring that most music production in this area was limited, expensive, and elitist. Does that mean the moog also has 'highly political uses?' Well, apparently not in this case. Without that elitist infrastructure creating a foundation for experimental electronic music, I'd venture to say that over half of the musicians on this comp wouldn't be where they are today.

The diversity of the comp is more than reflected in the notes provided by each artiste to accompany their submission. Thankfully, these aren't too detailed. Some of them are bolstered with scads of information – most of it useless statistical facts, and based on the Internet – which doesn't tell you much at all about the music. Often, this is a way to add legitimacy to an undernourished idea, When I read these condensed packets of data, I sometimes feel we're being invited to applaud the 'cleverness' of the artist, rather than the music. Z'EV's approach was to download a .wav file from an organ music website, and combine it with some factual medical data about the effect of sound on human organs. This, he tells us, was based on simple Google searches. Well, clever old Z'EV.

These misgivings aside, the music is all great. I particularly like the two pieces played by Charles Matthews, a genuine church organist. Two 'straight' pieces of beautiful music were captured by B J Nilsen and appear on disc one; these are probably the most conventional pieces on *Spire*. To me they sound amazing. That's my tastes for you. Nilsen does something more clever with these Matthews recordings on disc two, with 'Breathe'. Ostensibly another recording of Matthews playing the instrument, but where is he? All we hear is air, and vague chattering sounds…it's all to do with where Nilsen places his microphones. Nilsen's experiments, some of which involved crawling into those parts of an organ where man should not visit, seem to have formed the core of the *Spire* project. A real standout piece, 'Breathe' is scary, effective, pleasant, musical, awesome…

Other impressive and interesting musical performances come from Tom Recchion and Lary Seven. Recchion plays a spectral piece which is close to the microtonal orchestral works of Ligeti, and reminds one of certain well-known cinematic moon-travel images. Lary Seven worked with Jeff Peterson to record the sound of an old organ in an old chapel in old America…preoccupied with 'oldness', they used bad equipment and then played back their recorded sounds in the same chapel, with organ sounding again…the entire tape-work construction has a delightful wobbly, pre-aged effect. Scott Taylor also does a process-based piece, but his is nowhere near as interesting.

The sound of the organ for its own sake is worth exploring. Fennesz and Scott Minor (of

Sparklehorse) do just that, wallowing in a Wurlitzer's warbles, feeding them through filters and distortion. Their contribution is massively enjoyable. Biosphere plays 'Visible Invisible', and reminds one of Klaus Schulze seated behind banks of keyboards in 1972. A bit too tasteful this one. Oren Ambarchi brings in the Hammond organ, but also (mostly) guitars, his chosen instrument. Good music, but personally I'd have disqualified him for departing too far from the theme!

If subversive ideas are of interest, listen to F Petursson, who makes various profound points about art, ideology and religion, questioning our conditioning about acceptance of conventional notions of 'beauty'. It comes from a crafted art installation, a big tunnel sculpture which tapers up to end in an organ pipe. The sound of his 'Diablous' is a very effective and menacing deep bass drone. Leif Elggren continues to exhibit his obsession with royalty, and with politics; quite how his organ piece will bring the King of Sweden to his knees isn't made clear, but it sounds marvellous and is a strong opener to the set.

But what is an organ but air passing through cylindrical tubes? Just ask S B Sigmarsson, whose piece is simply a tuneless humming sound created by currents of air through huge pipes. Or Toshiya Tsunoda, the Japanese field-recordist whose work to date prominently features the sound of wind passing over pipes or through pipes. So he's an obvious choice…and he does his thing here, to highly pleasing effect. Then, to close down the set, there's Chris Watson, environmental documenter extraordinaire, with his 'Askam Wind Cluster'. Nothing but the sound of the wind itself, no pipes even. If Harding were to compile a drum-themed collection next, presumably Watson would be commissioned to record the sound of an animal being flayed to make a drum skin.

Also here: Philip Jeck (the great), with a surprisingly ordinary piece by his standards; and Jacob Kirkegaard, with enchanting miniature samples of organ works by an earlier composer namesake of his. Dreamy, time-travel episodes. In all *Spire* is a winner; it successfully rethinks the sound of the organ in many varied ways, all of which repay listening and relistening; and the package conveys many new concepts also, even if some appear a little pretentious. But we all need to *aspire* to something greater.

ED PINSENT 24/10/2004
www.touchmusic.org.uk

My Cat Is An Alien
The Rest is Silence
USA ECLIPSE RECORDS 027 2 x LP (2003)

This fine double LP is the most accessible thing I've heard yet from this duo. Four sides of long, trancey, droney stuff, with lots of instrumental, sonic and lyrical diversions along the way. The main pieces comprise very simple acoustic guitar phrases, drawn out for a long time and repeated monotonously;

there are also simple melodic works, and doomy landscape renderings which get pretty noisy and dark. Very little electric guitar on offer this time; no drums or percussion; very little amplification and very sparing use of studio effects. Through simple trancey repetition, MCIAA build up some very intense drones, pulses and oscillations; you can get lost inside its minimal, limpid beauty.

The recording quality is superb here (not as scuzzy as some of their other home recordings) and the crystalline sharpness allows the listener to enter a detailed world of sorrow and longing. A very strong elegiac and melancholy feel to the entire set; the duo almost manage to enclose the listener within their own private vision. The mood is successfully sustained across four sides, and aided no end by the half-muttered half-recited lyric poem on side three. The poetic titles continue to exhibit their science-fiction themes, for example 'Infinite Spaces', 'Last calls from the Earth', and 'Flames of Invisible Arms'. Previous works have fixated on a vast, unknown and unknowable cosmos (and its alien inhabitants), but here we have a song of a desolated earth, a wrecked home planet – deserted and empty after some unknown cosmic tragedy. All population vapourised, leaving only the oceans, overgrown and wild nature, and vast deserted cities in which to wander. One title sums up this bleak situation: 'Silence will come to last forever'.

ED PINSENT 20/11/2004
2172 Sierra Santiago, Bullhead City, AZ 86442, USA
www.eclipse-records.com

My Cat Is An Alien are interviewed this issue.

Jon Rose
The People's Music
UNITED KINGDOM RER MEGACORP RER JR7 CD 2003

The People's Music springs from an outrageous flight of fancy. English-born, Australia-based violinist Rose kept coming across cheap, Chinese-made violins in Sydney junk shops, and imagined the factories full of workers where they must have been produced. Rose was attracted to these models by their unusually shrill timbre. Similar to that of the traditional Chinese two-string violin, the erhu, it was far removed from the deeper, more resonant sound of violins in the west.

Rose uses the image of the violin factory workers as the basis for this delirious fantasia for string orchestra. It's unclear from the sleevenotes, however, whether any of his cheap Chinese violins were actually used in the recording of the piece, or in its live premiere. This sounds to have been an awesome event; staged in a remote outback town in Western Australia, it featured Rose performing live sampling of the orchestra alongside back-projected images of modern China and the factory workers.

In thirteen mostly short, hyperactive blasts of kinetic energy, Rose and his People's String Orchestra (conducted by Lindsay Vickery) set off on a whirlwind tour of the violn factory. Each track contains the word 'people' in its title. Together they form a day in the life of the factory and its workers, from 'Start the People' and 'Wake Up People' through to 'Busy People' and 'The People's End."' The relative calm and quiet of the opening piece are rudely shattered by a stentorian female voice, accompanied by Rose on twisting solo violin. "Working People" settles down into a simple, quotidian melody, but this is soon interrupted by the convulsive pummelling of a three-piece percussion ensemble. These vocal and percussive interjections recur at several points during the album. Their effect is to problematise the music: to disrupt the well-turned progress of the string orchestra, and to highlight the material conditions that led to its production.

This may make the album sound like some kind of dreary communist tract; nothing could be further from the truth, since Rose takes evident delight in the sonorities of the classical orchestra. Whether these take the form of the gorgeous swoon of 'Big People' or the dissonant chromaticism of 'Odd People', the strings are vibrant and exciting throughout. Despite the piece's history as part of a multimedia work, the listener never feels short-changed; the music is strong enough to exist as a composition in its own right.

RICHARD REES JONES
79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, UK
rermegacorp@dial.pipex.com
www.rermegacorp.com

Zukanican
E 5number
UNITED KINGDOM PICKLED EGG RECORDS EGG 51 10" VINYL LP (2003)

Lively and spirited instrumental music from these UK madcaps. One might almost call it a typical Pickled Egg release, and if you've heard Bablicon you'll know what I mean. The band comprise two percussionists, a bass player, a trumpeter, plus electronics and a keyboard – mostly what they do is swooping electronic effects, backed up by a very clever rhythm section who can execute complex time signatures and funky, danceable bass riffs. Really jolly stuff. They come from Liverpool, where last time I looked Frank Zappa continues to be held in some high esteem; if you like the late-period Zappa big bands (particularly those where Steve Vai plays a prominent role) who played every note perfectly in high-sheen drop-forge precision arrangements and at very high speeds, then chances are you'll enjoy this also. I'd certainly take this kind of musical funnery over Stereolab, although the cosmic-synth stuff (when it appears) is really just window-dressing to the Zucksters…member of band who provides said element has stage name Dr Harry Sumnall and he does it wearing a wrestling mask and a white suit. Wacky, eh? Six tracks, vinyl issue, housed in a nutty painted/collage sleeve.

ED PINSENT 30/10/2004
www.pickled-egg.co.uk
www.livingbrain.co.uk

Various No Men
A Classic Guide to No Man's Land: Pieces & Songs
GERMANY NO MAN'S LAND RECORDS NL 0329 2 x CD (2003)

This 2CD compilation presents an overview of the music of two linked German labels, No Man's Land and Review Records. Formed in the early 80s by Juergen Koeniger and Edith Walz, and operated since 1997 by Gerhard Busse, the labels have amassed a large body of work across a number of genres from free improv to dark ambient, noisy rock and experimental songcraft. The compilation is sensibly organised by genre, with the first disc concentrating on instrumental music and the second on songs. It's generously compiled, too – every track is previously unreleased.

The pieces on disc one are predominantly American and German in origin. David Weinstein opens the batting with 'The Economist,' a rather approximate mix of clunky effects, mid-tempo beats and bloopy analogue synths. Weinstein writes in the sleevenotes that the piece was made "using a variety of computers, keyboards, software and hardware both old and broken and new and confusing," and frankly the confusion shows. Things soon pick up, however, with the rich classical sonorities of Guy Klucevsek's 'Glow/Hearth' and the distressed atmospherics of Dawn's 'Shining.' Inspired by Kubrick's film of the same name, the latter is the undoubted highlight of disc one – a bewitching fusion of sinister crackles, resonant bell chimes and faint traces of a female voice.

Elsewhere, there are two vaguely 'world' influenced pieces featuring Werner Durand, who makes his own wind instruments out of PVC. The essential pointlessness of this activity is underscored by the pieces themselves, which meander pleasantly enough through thickets of digital delay without ever truly holding the attention. More engaging by far are two tracks by clarinettist Michael Lytle – the first an ear-splitting blast of improv, the second a loose and searching arc of quietist blowing.

Disc two is more diverse geographically, although equally variable in quality. Estonian rocker Leonid Soybelman is represented twice, once under his own name and once under that of his band Ne Zhdali. His songs recall the driven, angular moves of Wire with an irrepressible sense of fun attached. They enable one to overlook the mediocre, guitar-based funk workout by Ich Schwitze Nie that opens the disc, and the ludicrous cod-cabaret outpourings of Chris Newman that close it.

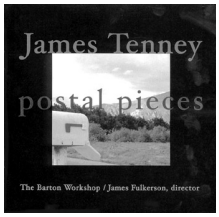
Between these dubious bookends sit a number of intriguing moments, notably Non Credo's chilling 'Latex Heart,' in which singer Kira Vollman delivers a passionate invocation of obsessive desire against a backdrop of churning bass and drums. From a completely different but no less interesting angle, former Ruins member and multi-instrumentalist Tatsuya Yoshida sings (in an invented language) and also essays a range of prog rock manoeuvres from chiming electric guitar and intricate percussion to galloping keyboards that happily (for this listener, at least) recall the glories of early 70s Genesis. Other highlights include Francois Ribac and Eva Schwabe's lovely piano ballad, 'Die Dolomiten,' Peter Cusack and Viv Corringham's seductive arrangement of a traditional Greek folk song, and Frank Schulte's inventive electronic setting of Anna Homler's precise vocalisations.

No compilation can hope to please everyone, but this one has an impressively high strike rate and gives a good sense of the range of approaches adopted by the artists in the No Man's Land stable. An excellent booklet with detailed and comprehensive notes on each artist rounds out the package.

RICHARD REES JONES
Gerhard Busse, Strassmannstr. 13, 10249 Berlon, Germany
nomansland@t-online.de
www.nomansland-records.de

James Tenney
Postal Pieces
USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80612-2 2 x CD(2004)

James Tenney's fame rests firmly on his computer music, his place in the history of modern music assured by the work he produced at Bell Labs in the early 1960s. This has been documented on a previous New World release(reviewed in SPI2).The present collection gives us Tenney the pioneering minimalist, in sharp contrast to the dense complexity of his electronic works. The forces he writes for are conventional and include a small choir, cello, viola, harp, percussion, chamber group. These 'Postal Pieces' were composed in the early 1970s, when Tenney was briefly based at the California Institute of the Arts. 'Postal' because each piece (there are eleven in all) is written on one side of a postcard. Instructions are minimal-as are the outcomes, though this does not always result in short pieces. 'August Harp' for solo harp, requires the performer to play through all the permutations of a four-note chord in all its voicings: the recording here is almost 43 minutes long. There is a detached quality to many of these pieces - as if their execution is less important than their composition. This is ironic when we consider the richness of much of Tenney's computer music. The detailed and painstaking experiments he made with electronics seem to have been undertaken with far more intensity than the less engaged experiments here. The pieces that work best are those where overtones and other more or less unpredictable effects are drawn from the instruments. The mass of noise that peaks at the centre of 'Never having written a note for percussion' or the detuned low string of the bass in 'Beast' that produces difference tones when bowed with other strings are moments of beauty. Much of this double CD, though, is rather insubstantial, certainly by comparison with New World's previous Tenney release. After a little over two hours very little seems to have been said. Whilst we should applaud New World for their dedication to Tenney's work and their completism, this latest offering is a far cry from his works of the previous decade.



CHRISATTON
www.newworldrecords.org

★REISSUES★

Amon Düül II
Vive La Trance
GERMANY BELL MUSIK GMBH
GRR 83 804 CD (2000)

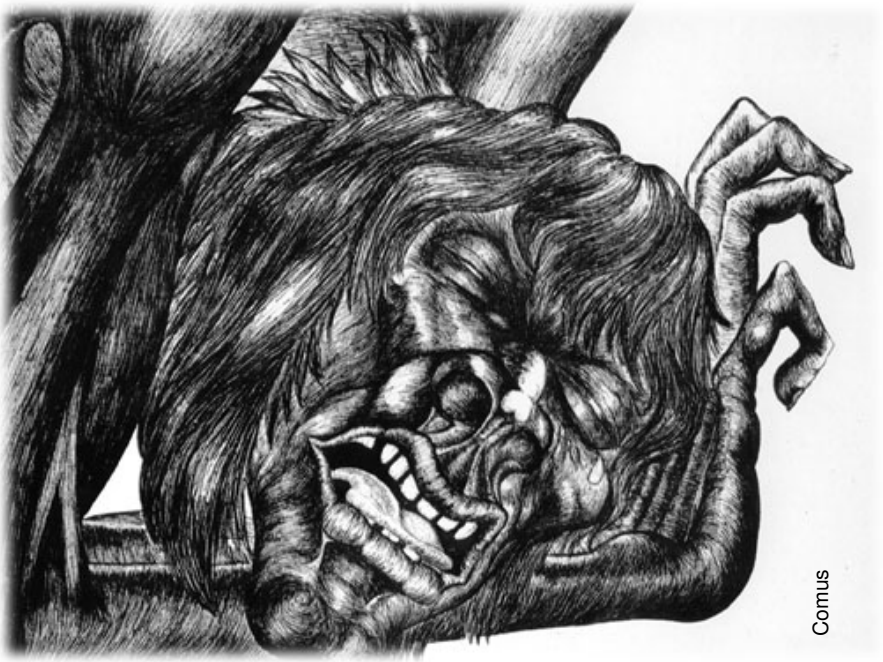
One song on this album is called 'Apocalyptic Bore' which sums up my opinion of this 1973 recording. As I see it, the problem here is that success in the UK and the opportunity to crack the US market encouraged ADII to proceed in a more commercial and musically slick direction resulting in a pretentious arty rock record that copied the musical fads swirling about at the time: pseudo-opera ('Jalousie'), rockabilly ('Pig Man'), US Southern rock ('Fly United'), Eurodisco (the cringeworthy bonus track 'Lilac Lillies') and Dylanesque ruminations ('Apocalyptic Bore') among others. The result is a terrible mishmash of music with no distinctive identity or any zest, and originality is nowhere to be found though I suppose in 'Jalousie', AD2 achieved the dubious feat of getting Kate Bush and Queen together while Ms Bush was still at school.

Probably only one song here is worth salvaging from the wreckord and that's 'Mozambique' minus the finger-clicking bit: the lyrics put this song in a line of songs running back to AD2's first album *Phallus Dei* dealing with European imperialism and tyrannical hegemons. (Given that Mozambique fell victim to ongoing civil war after 1975 with South Africa abetting rebels against the Marxist government there, the song is tragically prescient.) Musical highlights include a lightweight wall-of-guitar sound and delicate synthesiser background effects; the latter are probably the best part of the album overall. Apart from this, I say 'La Trance, c'est morte'.

JENNIFER HOR
www.bellmusik.de

Faust
Faust IV
UNITED KINGDOM VIRGIN RECORDS CDV2004 CD (1992)

Black sheep in an otherwise distinguished lineage this album may be, and many tracks admittedly aren't good, but this last original Faust 70s recording has survived the ravages of time pretty well compared to some of its 1973 contemporaries - I mean, apart from tragic UK music monthlies like Q and Mojo, who remembers that *Tubular Bells* recording? (Well I do I suppose, since I mentioned it.) And after three albums which many consider landmarks in the history of experimental rock / pop, Faust were entitled to, er, relax and have a bit of fun with the fourth - advice they apparently took too much to heart, since it was probably during the *Faust IV* recording sessions that they spent a night in the slammer for running up a debt. Some of that carefree spirit breezes through this album which is lacking in more recent releases and reissues, some of which also carry the stench of someone trying to cash in on the Faust reputation.



Without a doubt, the highlight is 'Krautrock', certainly the first and last and only word in combining shimmering guitar noise textures and a hypnotic rhythm and the track that, in the manner of Helen of Troy, launched a thousand careers in avant-garde music. Of the other pieces, the standard falls away: 'Jennifer' has a hint of glorious showering guitar debauchery which ends all too quickly (I have heard Mike Morley / Gate's version of this song by the way and apart from the honky-tonk piano coda I remember it as a mostly heavy-handed demolition job); 'Picnic on a Frozen River, Deuxieme Tableux', a reworking of a piece from *Faust So Far*, is a three-parter where the first movement is not bad, the second jazzy movement is good but the third movement (the reworked piece) disappoints due to a mundane guitar improvisation after we've just heard 'Krautrock' and 'Jennifer'; and 'Just a Second (Starts like That!)' is a stream-of-consciousness track that becomes quite unhinged with near-deranged piano and searing guitar blasts in the background amid other unsettling effects.

Missing from the CD is a lyric sheet and English language translations of the French lyrics on a couple of tracks which would have helped to gauge how much of Faust's preoccupation with the alienation of modern industrial life actually made it onto the record under Richard Branson's regime. (Virgin Records is well-named, that's for sure!)

The album points in a more commercially acceptable if slightly dissident direction (a path well-trodden by others) for Faust had they continued past 1975 and in that sense could be considered historically important despite its patchy quality. Those of you who already have *The Wumme Years* set and want TWO CDs with 'Krautrock' (the track features on one disc in the set) are certainly welcome to *Faust IV*, as are first-time visitors - a thousand more (hopefully good) careers in avant-garde music are certainly needed.

JENNIFER HOR

Comus
First Utterance
JAPAN VICTOR VICP-62166 CD (2002?)

Some may think the world as portrayed by early 70s British folk rock / pop was all bright and fairly innocent, populated by shepherds, fairies, buxom wenches hot for sex and May queens. But as this record (originally released in 1971) shows, this romanticised Anglo-Arcadia held its fair share of rapacious spirits, deranged serial killers and pagan fertility rituals culminating in human sacrifice. Comus's music may fit firmly into the acoustic British folk camp with the one electric guitar hard to detect at times, but the lyrics set this band apart from its contemporaries, ranging from a forest tableau where a Pan-like figure stalks a nymph ('Diana'), to murder and burial involving a fair bit of necrophilia ('Drip Drip'), to serial rape and murder ('Song to Comus')

and a lynching or martyrdom ('The Bite'), among other matters. One track 'The Prisoner' breaks away from the rural realm and the third person narratives to present a first person account of the medical abuse of a psychiatric patient. With this recording, Comus deftly deflated the post-hippie folk dream with its pre-Industrial Revolution nostalgia and turned it into a Gothic folk nightmare complete with a logical conclusion: if you're mad enough to want to fly off with the fairies, you're mad enough for electric shock treatment.

The music is performed with much gusto: Roger Wootton's vocals can be unusual and a bit inhuman at times but they always brim with evil relish. The melodies are at their strongest on the opener 'Diana' which is obvious single material, and a couple of other tracks, 'The Bite' most notably, have good passages of melody as well. 'The Herald' features some beautiful liquid acoustic guitar streams overlaid by ethereal female singing; the instrumental section in the middle which includes violin, flute and reeds however does not hold up too well. The one purely instrumental track 'Bitten' is the weakest link on the entire album but mercifully it's short and it's back to business with 'The Prisoner' which musically is not that remarkable but features a terrifying climax. The lyrics overall are well written and not too much like the high school purple poetry favoured by too many generations of rock bands - Cathedral singer / lyricist Lee Dorrian would have done well a decade ago to study Comus's songs to see how rock poetry can be done and maybe Cathedral's career from 1995 to 2000 would not have been so wasted.

Unfortunately in a world where certain episodes of the sci-fi show Dr Who were banned from TV in some countries because they showed live gargoyles or devils, this Comus album probably did not receive the air play it deserved on its release due to its unsavoury subject matter but its cult status since then seems definitely assured in certain places: Swedish prog / black metal band Opeth named an album of theirs 'My Arms Your Hearse' after a line in 'Drip Drip' and the Japanese psychedelic folk rock band Ghost draws inspiration from Comus, Gravy Train and similar dark folk acts from the 1970s. (And my lyric sheet comes from a Russian website. And if you think the idea of progressive black metal sounds terrible, how does the idea of Tolkien black metal sound? Yesss, my preciousss, such muzzzic existsss!) Whatever your views on early 70's British folk may be, and I don't blame you if they're scathing, this album at least deserves your listening attention: it is an interesting commentary on the fantasies of the fading middle class post-hippie rock scene. Ironically, Comus themselves were a casualty of the scene, fading out in 1974 after a dismal second album. This Japan-only CD issue seems to be the only one of its kind. There was a double LP set issued in the last few years on Italy's Get Back label which features 5 extra tracks but I hear it's very hard to find. Both issues feature the original 1971 LP gatefold sleeve

artwork.

JENNIFER HOR

See: http://artrock.rinet.ru/review/advanced/comus/first_utterance.htm for lyrics

Mogollar

Mogollar

SOUTH KOREA WORLD PSYCHEDELIA LTD WPC6-8474 CD (2004)

Yet another very welcome jewel from the Turkish psychedelic rock scene that lasted several years from 1967 to the mid-70s and which World Psychedelia Ltd released on CD recently is this beautiful self-titled album by Mogollar. This band was one of the leading exponents of 'Anadolu Pop' (Anatolian Pop) - indeed, Mogollar practically invented this genre which combines Western rock with native Turkish music and instruments. For a time, the band also boasted Cem Karaca, one of Turkey's leading rock performers in the 70s and a man of a radical political left-wing bent; he spent the 80s in exile in Germany after a military coup in Turkey, returned in the 90s to resume his musical career and was still performing at gigs right up until his sudden death from a heart attack in March 2004. Turkish psychedelic rock's fortunes mirrored that of Karaca to some extent; many groups in that scene held similar views as Karaca did and disbanded in the late 70s when the army seized power (Mogollar disbanded in 1976); I understand there has been a revival of psychedelic music in Turkey and some renewed interest in the old bands but the scene is very small.

The original self-titled album, made in the late 60s, consists of 11 instrumental tracks, all quite short and most of them deserving a longer playing time! A number of tracks are atmospheric (tracks 1 and 9 shine in this regard), strongly redolent of harsh desert landscapes under a burning sun, and with their galloping rhythms and beats would not be out of place in the paella and spaghetti westerns of the time. A distinctive fuzzy electric guitar sound combines well with gorgeous and exotic tones of the saz (a long-necked lute with frets). All so soon the pieces together flit by and the album proper ends - the listener only has enough time to register the melodies and rhythms and a burst of improvisation, and savour the ambience, and then they're gone! For a number of tracks, a longer playing time and a fuller development of the melodies and more improvisation could have improved the music and lifted the album into greatness when it was first released. But I understand in those days, the rock scene in Turkey was very heavily oriented to singles. Which brings us to the 8 bonus tracks which are various singles and their B-sides released originally in 1970 / 71; these are not nearly as interesting as the instrumental pieces (no big surprise) as they're obviously pitched to a more mainstream and Western-oriented audience. (Also during this time Mogollar were based in Paris where they recorded an album that won a major music award in France.) On these pieces, the organ more or less replaces the electric guitar as the dominant instrument and the saz is often sidelined as well on a number of tracks.

The musicians are all very technically skilled, especially the guy playing the violin on track 16, but these bonus pieces lack that wonderful ambience of the desolate central Anatolian plateaux and mountains with their phallic fairy chimneys, surreal geological formations of travertine which look like giant balls of cotton, the hot dry summers and freezing winters. (Well, I imagine Anatolian Turkey to be so, having never visited there.) I hear Mogollar did reform in the mid-90s with a twenty-something-aged musician and a more rock-oriented approach; they have released 4 albums but apparently the new music is not great. Better perhaps to stick to their early releases and remember Mogollar as innovators and leaders of an underground music scene which for a long while was forgotten in Turkey but is gradually reviving with new influences.

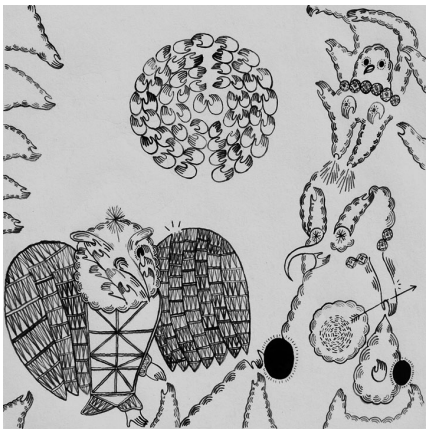
JENNIFER HOR

www.aquariusrecords.org
www.forcedexposure.com

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ERRATUM: On pages 152 and 156 in TSP#12, World Psychedelia Ltd's country of domicile was shown as US instead of South Korea. Whoops! Apologies to all TSP readers, especially our Korean readers.

SONGS



Devendra Banhart
Rejoicing in the Hands
USA YOUNG GOD RECORDS
YG24 CD (2004)

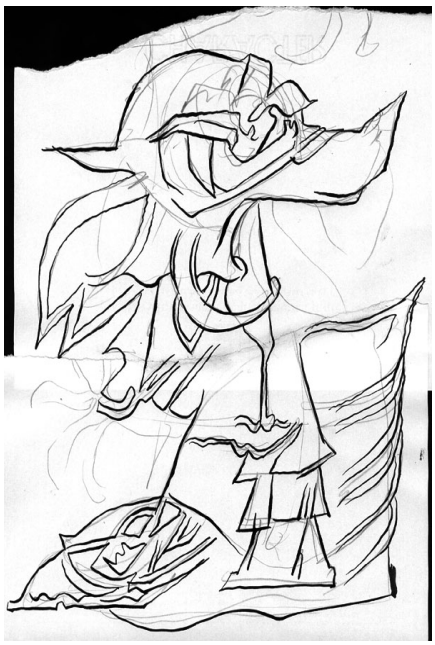
He may be only in his early 20s and this is only his 2nd full-length recording, but Banhart's voice sounds amazingly confident and makes him seem much, much older than he is, concentrating decades of the wisdom, culture and history of rural folk in the Appalachian and Ozark mountain regions and the lower Mississippi River areas in the USA. Though the style of music initially comes over as simple folk, dominated mainly by acoustic guitar with discreet and minimal accompaniment from other musicians, and the lyrics seem to be the guileless stream-of-consciousness sort, pay close attention to the details of the songs, their arrangement and production, and the choice of musicians to accompany him on some pieces and you realise Banhart is a cluey operator who more or less knows what he and his music need, and who can help him achieve what the songs require.

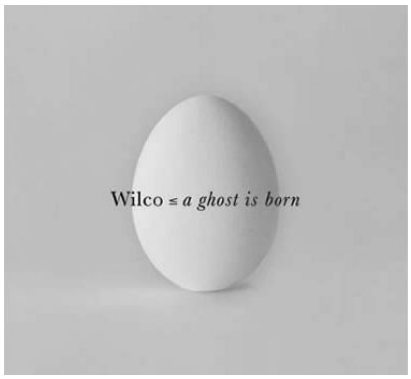
For a nomad who spent his childhood bouncing between the US and Venezuela, Banhart chooses to focus his lyrics on simple, everyday things of the moment (I guess when he's older and has had more life experience, he'll tackle the big issues of life, death, religion, politics, the environment, why plastic surgery is so popular in Venezuela and how Hugo Chavez manages to survive as President there despite the constant plotting against him) and his vocal delivery, steeped as it is in the folk cultures of the southern US and Hispanic America, and with its world-weary old-timer croak alternating with clear youthful tones, gives more weight and dignity to the lyrical subject matter than it might perhaps deserve. Our man's not averse to writing melody and many songs have very strong and memorable if not immediately catchy tunes; no matter how short they are, the songs all sound very complete and self-contained and keep up a high standard (no filler here!) from start to finish - evidence of a strong grasp of songcraft.

The strongest tracks on the album include 'Fall' where a discreet rhythm accompanies Banhart's strongly accented vocal style faintly reminiscent of the young Robert Plant during Led Zeppelin's early 70s folksy blues period; 'Rejoicing in the Hands' where Banhart is joined on vocals by songstress Vashti Bunyan (funny that, an American with a Sanskrit / Indian name and an English lady with a Persian name!); and 'Todo Los Dolores', sung in Spanish and complete with a botched bit near the beginning where the tune first changes.

It will be interesting to see what future directions Banhart will follow in his music especially if he continues his peripatetic lifestyle and maintains an open attitude to people and new experiences. He may consider incorporating more Hispanic American folk influences, in particular from the ritualistic aspects and the cults of Latin American folk Catholicism: Santa Muerte, El Dia deTodos los Santos, Maria Lionza ...what a rich vein he could mine! Collaborating with like-minded folkies across the US and the rest of the world would assist too. Remarkably, Banhart's two albums so far have been released by Michael Gira's Young God Records - I didn't imagine Gira would have been so impressed, shows you how much notice I take of his post-Swans activities - but, come to think of it, I can't imagine very many other North American labels willing to take on such an idiosyncratic performer apart from perhaps Canada's Constellation Records.

JENNIFER HOR
www.younggodrecords.com





Wilco
A Ghost is Born
USA NONESUCH 7559-79809-2
ENHANCED CD (2004)

The August 2004 issue of *The Wire* contained an interesting cover feature on Wilco. This described their unexpected transformation from run-of-the-mill alt-country band to something more avant-garde in ambition (a move which involved the departure of several unconvinced band members) and gave them a chance to talk enthusiastically about their new working methods, developed with producer Jim O'Rourke. If, like me, you were intrigued by the prospect of a band throwing out their rule book and trying something new and risky, you may be slightly disappointed by *A Ghost is Born*, their second release in this vein.

It will only take one listen to find out that Wilco haven't shed all of their middle-of-the-road trappings. Several songs are so pretty and polite they could sit happily on a Coldplay or Supergrass LP, and there's the unfortunate whiff of hours spent listening to their parents' record collections: I heard echoes of, amongst others, Split Enz, 10CC, Sparks, Stackridge and Peter Gabriel (his first LP anyway); in other words the more quirky and clever end of 70s AOR, not something that needs any more watered-down rehashing right now.

But there is undeniably something interesting

going on here. Whilst a good half of the tracks meander around some dire mournful piano chords or listless guitar strumming for the first few minutes, they suddenly come alive as soon the song proper has been dispensed with. Did main man Jeff Tweedy feel it was only at this point that he'd earned the right to hit the avant-garde button? Either way, these short and imaginative instrumental sections make beautiful miniature textural compositions in their own right, and the way they explode into being suggests the band achieved some form of cathartic release in creating them. Perhaps it also took a while for them to get the hang of this new way of working, as towards the centre of the record they do manage to integrate both the sung and instrumental parts very convincingly (in 'Muzzle of Bees' and 'Handshake Drugs').

However two tracks stand totally apart from the rest and were rightly held up for praise by critics. 'Spiders (Kidsmoke)' is a neat twist on a familiar theme, sitting somewhere between Neu's collected works and Can's 'Mother Sky', and doing for the motorik beat what the Spacemen 3 did for Detroit Rock (with a sprinkling of glam rock thrown in). Then there's the unassuming feedback hum and radio interference drone which forms a very pleasant almost-10 minute long coda to 'Less Than You Think' and reminds me a little of Yo La Tengo's more pastoral moments.

It's interesting that these two tracks were described by several critics as 'experimental'. What does that mean in this case? Both tracks follow well-established (if not exactly popular) compositional approaches, and to the listener there's little evidence that Wilco were trying anything new except on their own terms (this is not a criticism by the way). Maybe the experiment is a political one – will their fans like their new direction? Will they pick up new fans? Do they care anyway? Whatever the band's intentions, I think what actually sets these two tracks aside from the rest of the record is their simplicity and the fact they each take a single strong idea and develop it to its conclusion, instead of struggling to build something out of several weaker ideas.

Apparently Wilco are going to continue in this direction, and all power to them. But on the basis of *A Ghost Is Born*, I think they've still got to become a little less self-conscious and a little more fearless if they want to make the music they aspire to.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

David Garland
On the Other Side of the Window
GERMANY REVIEW RECORDS
RERE 97 CD (2003)

New York singer-songwriter David Garland is clearly a man who likes to take his time over things. *On The Other Side of the Window* is only his third album since 1986, not counting a couple of collaborations and an intriguing-sounding album of Beach Boys cover versions that was, for some reason, only released in

Japan. Still, the fact that he has a day job as a presenter on a US public radio station goes a long way towards explaining the scarcity of his recorded output.

On this predominantly tasteful collection Garland presents the pop song as a series of artful strategies. Steeped in quicksilver intelligence and musical acumen, these songs easily sate the discerning listener's desire for ambition and drama, but sacrifice some of the impulse to direct communication that characterises a great song.

This uncomfortable imbalance is well illustrated by the opening title track. A long, tranquil introduction is played out on piano, strings and percussion before Garland's mellow, wistful baritone enters. The song is a litany of fleeting observations made from a distance: 'The pavement laid/the payment made/the travelled mile/the answered smile…' It's affecting, yet curiously static and disjointed; and matters aren't helped when the backing chorus (consisting of members of Garland's family) come in and trill 'What was your intention? What was your invention? What was your contention? What was your convention?' in laboured style.

As the album progresses, we find ourselves deep in territory previously occupied by the likes of Magnetic Fields and The Divine Comedy: arch, witty lyrics beautifully sung to a lush instrumental accompaniment. The timbral palette is varied and engaging, with accordion, flute and harmonica adding frequent colour to the basic setting of piano and strings. Yet Garland is no melodist, and too often the music lapses into trite staccato patterns. The words, meanwhile, are persistently too clever by half, and some kind of nadir is reached on 'How To' when Garland declaims 'On page 290 at the top there's a diagram marked Figure 4.23, multiply the vector of my gesture and just add the end result to all the crazy things I've done.'

There is much to enjoy and admire here, from the pulsing fields of distortion that surround the lengthy 'Distance' to the concrète clusters animating 'Phantom Limb.' But, for all Garland's vocal gifts, the eloquence of his texts and the floridness of the music ultimately become wearisome. On the closing 'Pastorale', Garland absents himself entirely in favour of an untreated field recording of water and birdsong. It's a welcome act of self-effacement that one wishes had been adopted more often.

RICHARD REES JONES
www.davidgarland.com

Dean Roberts
Be Mine Tonight
USA KRANKY KRANK 063 CD
(2003)

Global traveller Dean Roberts takes a step closer to a more structured singer-songwriter niche on *Be Mine Tonight*, a more mellow and tuneful record, still with some musical improvisation, than his *Dean Roberts and the Black Moths Play the Grand Cinema* release for Ritornell some years ago (and re-released by Staubgold in 2004). However, *Be Mine...* is not as satisfying as that earlier record even though Roberts seems more comfortable here than then. Sometimes recordings where the artist is more assured in his/her adopted style and role are not necessarily better than those recordings where the same artist is perhaps testing him/herself musically and so trying harder or compensating for known deficiencies in some way. Certainly *Be Mine...* lacks the tension and textured musical layering, where Roberts's voice was just one of many elements, that made his Ritornell / now-Staubgold release so interesting and obviously highly regarded; in particular, his tremulous vocals can be rather too fragile, as well as being restricted in range, flexibility and in expressing emotion, for the music which can be quite robust.

I find the vocals the biggest sticking point, seeing that on this record the singing is one of the most important elements in the music if not the most important, and this is a great pity as the music itself, featuring cello, glass harmonica and acoustic guitar as well as electronics, is often moody and possesses a dark, sorrowful and a sort of grand-but-fading beauty that can remind one of Canadian bands like Do Make Say Think and Godspeed You Black Emperor whose concerns parallel on a bigger scale those of Roberts: his lyrics centre on how urban societies can crush people's humanity and leave them rootless and without direction. Perhaps one day he could team up with people like Christian Fennesz and David Sylvian among others to create a record of partly improvised, partly structured music with lyrics that have a strong social conscience delivered by someone who really can sing; I see he is certainly heading that way.

JENNIFER HOR
PO Box 259319, Chicago, IL 60625-9319, United States

Autistic Daughters
Jealousy and Diamond
USA KRANKY KRANK076 CD
(2004)

For the follow-up to *Be Mine Tonight*, global nomad Dean Roberts teams up Austrian musicians Werner Dafeldecker and Martin Brandlmayer in a three-piece band format (where did he get that idea I wonder?) to write and compose music that moves closer to singer-songwriter territory than before

with rock and jazz rhythms and other structural elements while retaining the flexibility of improv. The style and rhythm of the music overall seems more confident in direction; Roberts is clearly more comfortable and assertive in carving a unique niche as a singer-writer of songs in a genre not usually known for or even accommodating of such a concept. His singing also now has a definite style and is starting to express a range of emotions; there's still a quivering fragility to his voice but it now complements the music's style and mood (the latter of which there is plenty). Whatever direction this music will take in the future, it's sure to be even stronger and more distinctive and hopefully there'll be an even wider range of emotion.

The lyrics pick up again the theme of urban alienation and how it affects personal relationships; there are monologues throughout the CD which give it the appearance of a series of one-man/one-act radio plays. Occasions on this CD exist where the mood, the instruments' sound or the rhythm remind me of Canadian band Do Make Say Think who have mined similar musical and conceptual ground. Indeed, this album has an American sensibility or feel about it despite the mostly European musicians performing on it; probably this is because the CD's subject matter harks to the so-called American dream which has always had a dark underbelly in which people ended up relentlessly ground into the dust and oblivion if, through bad luck or forces beyond their control, they did not satisfy their dreams or the demands of a society that worships celebrity and material success with no time for failures. As the Anglophone world continues to slide into an uncertain, post-imperial Third World future and the American Century looks more and more like a bitter joke, I think we will have need of more people like Dean Roberts in the arts to document the decay people will find themselves in.

Autistic Daughters: quite an ironic name for Roberts's trio seeing there's nothing at all autistic about the music or the lyrics. I'm hoping in future AD, should Roberts continue with the name, will include more musicians (one notes Christian Fennesz among others has a credit on this album).

JENNIFER HOR
Kranky, PO Box 259319, Chicago IL 60625-9319 USA

S.Q.E.
The Abyss Stares Back
USA INFLUX COMMUNICATIONS NO NUMBER CD (2004)

S.Q.E., who in real life goes by the name of J Greco, has produced an album of longish, folky variations on an ambient theme. Amber Asylum's Kris Force contributes guest vocals on 'Jorinda X' and 'The Wondrous Boat Ride', emoting like a dark angel around Greco's dreamlike soundscapes. Light touches of dulcimer and tubular bells add to the crepuscular atmosphere, evoking the more liturgical moments of Dead Can Dance.

Clocking in at around six minutes each, both songs derive considerable power from their unhurried stillness and quiet, gradual accumulation of detail. Greco draws out similarly extended moods in the instrumental tracks 'Epitaph 1' and 'Diamond', but these are largely shorn of the ritualistic elements that make the songs so bewitching. As a result, they lack focus and direction. Things pick up somewhat on 'Epitaph 2', whose clammy drones are disrupted by slashing electric guitar.

Given Greco's careful attention to detail on these pieces, it's both surprising and unfortunate that he also chooses to include a song like 'Cat' on the album. Here Danielle Hlatky's breathy alto delivers a clunky lyric including such gems as 'your heart regulates the flow of oxygen to the brain', while the melody is sullied by a lumpen tuba accompaniment. The following '1974', however, is excellent - propelled by bubbling organ and a racy synth groove, it brings a vertiginous, dubby edge to proceedings. In sum, the disc thankfully doesn't attempt to live up to the grandiose promise of its title, and is an alluring if uneven collection of nocturnal moments.

RICHARD REES JONES
influx@wrybread.com

Margareth Kammerer
To Be An Animal of Real Flesh
AUSTRIA CHARIZMA CHA 023 CD (2003)

On this, her first solo album, Margareth Kammerer has surrounded herself with a distinguished cast of collaborators and remixers, as well as proving herself to be a talented singer and guitarist in her own right. Kammerer takes as her source material work from a number of modernist poets, including E.E. Cummings, Anne Carson and Paul Celan. These texts share an emotional and lyrical honesty that Kammerer unerringly exploits in her singing and playing. Five of the fourteen tracks here are solo acoustic recordings, on which Kammerer's fluid and confident guitar work is matched by the arresting qualities of her voice, a bewitching instrument drenched in sustain and vibrato.

The fun really begins when Kammerer invites others to rework and add to the acoustic songs. Of the collaborations, Axel Dörner delights with the jazzy, querulous tone of his trumpet on 'I Carry Your Heart With Me,' delivering a soft, breathy lyricism that is wholly in keeping with the romantic bravery of Cummings' poem. Elsewhere, Yoshida Tatsuya (of Ruins) drums with powerful, effective restraint on 'Willow C'Est Que J'Aime,' while the Necks' Chris Abrahams adds spare, ghostly piano to 'As Your Nightly Dreams'.

As one might expect, the remixes are a mixed bag sonically. Highlights include Nicholas Bussmann's creatively noisy take on 'Open His Head Baby', which is nudged along by a barrage of whooshes, hums and whizzes on a bed of spidery percussion. Philip Jeck impresses, too, with a fleeting vignette of shimmer and distortion that does full justice to the imagistic density of Celan's 'The Bright Stones'. Olivier Lamm, meanwhile, wickedly transforms Yusef Komunyakaa's somewhat rambling poem 'Facing It' into a whirl of electronic playfulness and delirious free drumming.

Surprisingly, it is Fred Frith who most disappoints with his remix of 'Somewhere I Have Never Travelled'. His tasteful washes of electric guitar are pleasant enough, but the accompanying drum machine patterns sound tacked-on and misplaced. Christoph Kurzmann, too, seems to lose sight of the original with his insistent deconstruction of Kammerer's voice on his version of 'I Carry Your Heart With Me'. Otherwise the collaborators and remixes do a fine job, giving alternate readings of the source poems and providing stimulating contrasts to Kammerer's unadorned solo approach.

RICHARD REES JONES
www.charhizma.com
charizma@charizma.com
www.charizma.com

Plenty more song-based material in JONATHAN HELLIER's column over there ☞

HELLIER

"Somebody Tell Me What to Think!"

Daniel Patrick Quinn
Severed From The Land
UNITED KINGDOM SUILVEN RECORDINGS
SUILVEN005 CD (2004)

Rustic, contemplative, dourly super, this Wednesday of a record drips from the speakers like tears from an old man's eyeholes. Picture the scene, feel the pathos as his lifelong stoic reserve cracks under the inexorable flood of emotions he no longer has the strength to repress… each deeply-etched facial skingroove dancing the rhythm of a different denial as invisible aeroplanes crisscross leathery cheeks with vapour trails of warm human salt. His shoulders clench and unclench incontinently. He doesn't know there's anyone watching.

But I'm watching.

I'm watching him in my imagination, whence he arose as a fourth-dimensional personification of my subjective response to *Severed From The Land*, a recording made by Daniel Patrick Quinn in "the corner of an Edinburgh bedroom". Like all fourth-dimensional beings and objects, my astrally lachrymose old man partakes of height, width, depth and *inwardness*. This quality of inwardness pervades Mr Quinn's peculiar take on the DIY-ambient-folk-drone genre, distinguishing it from eighteen quintillion other efforts at same. It's so easy to jump the bandwagons of fundamentalism, so tough to maintain the kind of grim commitment to keeping-it-unreal one really must evince to stand any chance of making art with these ingredients, this kind of credo. Trippily, Quinn prods the soft underbelly of his basic incompetence with sharp sticks- a brave and honest man, I like him and would offer him my daughter's hand in marriage were I not too busy reviewing records ever to conceive her. He can't really play anything, but his artlessness commends him and if you give him a go he'll have you trembling on the brink of *chiaroscuro* inwardness in no time. Alas, I'm in danger of being swallowed by this music. Kiss the children for me: I may not reach paragraph's end. Quinn's touch is dangerously spiral and potential listeners are advised to develop an obsessive-compulsive routine of meaningless repetition in order to counter its queer, elliptical gravity.

Characterised by its author as "intelligent farmyard music" that's "faithful to Britain", this is a really good CD. The drones are infant-fresh, the vocals pockmarked and brown. Cello, guitar, percussion, bass and trumpet are knitted together like a chunky Aran jumper. No ego. No *sturm und drang*. Just six tracks of deep faery sonority; six stately, processional plodathons. The pace is leisurely- chord changes infrequent as bowel movements in extreme old age- y'know, just chewing contemplatively on something this slow and unworldly in 2004 gives me more pleasure than cocaine. Standout track- "Nine Standards Rigg", six minutes of pagan earth-mysticism wearing its gruff Northern vernacular like a kestrel on the wrist of a green-skinned Christ. If this don't shake your warped demonic craving for novelty, you might as well be Simon Cowell.

Warmly recommended, but tie your leg to heavy furniture in order that you don't fall in and lose the will to remain separate from God.

JONATHAN HELLIER
Suilven Recordings, PO Box 28494 Edinburgh EH4 1YY Scotland UK
info@suilvenrecordings.com
www.suilvenrecordings.com

Guapo
Five Suns
UNITED KINGDOM CUNEIFORM RECORDS RUNE184
CD (2004)

Familiar to many, new to me, UK death-prog / art-metal / Cthulhu-psych outfit Guapo kick off their latest offering in style: great radioactive belches of plum-coloured gong exhale like poisonous volcanic fumes… cymbals shimmer and fidget in anticipation of imminent eruption… pallid fingers coax infantile slurping from a terrified Rhodes… the sense of anticipation is palpable and immediate. Before I can even remove my coat I am gripped, my attention riveted to the gorgeous satanic pantomime unfurling around me. Labial curtains part and I glimpse the feast upon which these maniacs would have me gorge: golden platters of sub-bass straining under the weight of rotten psychedelic haggis, well-hung haunches of treacly venison-Mellotron, blue-lipped pygmies impaled upon honeyed javelins of guitar, the entire repulsive melange throbbing like a glans! *Mare mia Jesu!*

Vomiting in awe, I mount my titty harness and attempt to assess the situation. Sixty-two minutes of ram-it-down-your-throat electric violence- the first forty-six constituting the title track in five movements, the remainder divided between two more tracks ("Mictlan" and "Topan"), which eschew the attack for something more limpid and child-friendly. What? No, just kidding- they do no such thing- there's no dessert to be had at this banquet, it's all MEAT. Do you like meat, senor? I *looooove* meat, mmmph, Guapo be my butcher now and for all time, I prithee! Trample down the vegetable gardens of ambient spacerock- plants are gay! New cannibal passions await us within Guapo's great glass slaughterhouse! Yep, it's that kind of record- displaces the Pierrot-mask of romantic-modernist godquest and unveils the latent lizard, that cold-blooded predator who cares nothing for touchy-feely mammal meanings, just wants to rend and tear and swallow hot chunks of wriggling noise while basking in the glow of the titular *Five Suns*.

I guess my hyperbole is borne out of relief as much as anything- it's so good to hear some contemporary music that's indelibly *rock*, recognisably *progressive* in the classic sense (reference points discernible to an ignoramus like me: Crimson, Magma, Ruins, Boredoms) but isn't the Mars Volta or Radiohead. Or fucking Godspeed You Black Emperor. Really it's got more in common with stoners like Electric Wizard or the Heads- yes it's more complex and polyrhythmic, more jazz I suppose- but the underlying vibe of nasty outsider heaviosity is reassuringly similar. Various themes and motifs thread their way through its rippling mass: the group interplay is intense and expert: each musician's contributions open doors for the other two to come storming through, so no effort is wasted and everything contributes to the greater scheme- namely, beating the living shit out of the gloomiest, doomiest chord sequences this side of 1973. Sometimes the tumult dies down awhile into jaunty keyboard-driven grooves which crackle with inventiveness as they prepare the ground for more solar kamikaze action; I love the way one can feel it coming as things start to hiss and whinny, soporific riffs suddenly rabid, then whooooosh! Vertiginous ascent, and we're rolling naked between the stars, gorging on buttered elephant and dollops of dolphin sushi…. Yeah, gimme!

Simultaneously knotted and loose, formal and orgiastic, I sense a visionary project of liberation-or-bust lurking in the pummelled tissues of this extraordinary music. Like being trepanned, it forces blood into the brain's virgin chambers and opens up the jade heavens of the Buddha.

JONATHAN HELLIER
Cuneiform Records PO Box 8427 Silver Spring MD 20907-8427 USA
guapo@zed-one-studios.co.uk
www.guapo.co.uk

Leonard Cohen
Dear Heather
USA COLUMBIA COL5147682000 CD (2004)

A couple of times I've stuck this on in the presence of hipster friends of mine- you know, people who own John Zorn records and can name all the members of Slint- only to be met by gales of 'you can't be serious' laughter as the patented Muzak groove of "Go No More A-Roving" (the opening track, an adaptation of a lyric by Lord Byron) schmoozes languorously into their lives, all Kenny G sax and smoooooth black-lady backing vocal. Do I let such philistinism soil my deep appreciation of Cohen's genius, the light that he brings to the world? No I don't. I simply tell them to *allow him his metaphor*, or fuck off. Meaning? Well (and I think I osmosed this idea from Julian Cope), would same cognoscenti dismiss Faust for their wilful primitivism? Or Keiji Haino for painting everything black and roaring like a man disembowelled? I should hope not. Each distinct aesthetic agenda in turn connotes its own distinct illustrative techniques which (on a good day) magically transubstantiate rubbish into jewellery, rather like tantra. A good listener must surely allow the artist his or her metaphor prior to any significant appraisal of the work being made... Or fuck off. That means, 'go away- I dismiss you'. With me now?

Leonard Cohen is one of the greatest songwriters ever to draw breath, and during the last twenty years his preferred metaphor has been to clothe his songs in raiments so modest as to provoke accusations of deliberate bathos from those who can't take art seriously unless it's dressed up (or down) according to critically-acceptable criteria: to wit, crappy-sounding Casio synths from the 80s; drum machines that know nothing of acid house or anything since; soft-boiled saxophones swimming in grease; a feather duvet of female vocal cocooning the *basso profundo* growl of the master. I've got pee running down my leg just describing it to you, and I like Royal Trux. How can this be? That's easy: the songs- lyrically and melodically- are amazing, and the arrangements are so guileless and emotionally truthful, they're actually quite punk. That's punk as in iconoclastic, not the denuded set of pop-cultural signifiers that's become a sort of trans-media shorthand for "I'm a complete cunt". You *can* tell the difference- can't you?

OK, I'm sure I needn't fill y'all in on Cohen's eminence as lyric poet, troubadour, novelist and impossibly cool mofo during the last forty-odd years. During that time, he hasn't put a foot wrong: yet his work since emerging from a six-year sojourn as a Zen monk during the 90s has evinced an emotional and spiritual resonance which transcends even the 60s work that made his name. 2001's *Ten New Songs* saw him team up with co-writer Sharon Robinson on a series of elegant duets which married carnality and theophany in the manner of W.B. Yeats' *Last Poems*. *Dear Heather* repeats the trick, and then some- lovingly supported by Robinson (on three tracks) and Anjani Thomas (on most of the others), Cohen marks his septuagenarian status with a newfound experimentalism that belies his age. The minimalist arrangements familiar to long-term listeners are herein rendered with newfound playfulness and enigmatic Zen-beatnik fusion. His former 'morbid balladeer' persona effaced by the ascetic rigours of monastic life, it's artistically congruent of him to be singing much less nowadays- rasping lugubriously as ever, yes, but now that sepulchral voice emerges from the shadows, leaving centre stage to glorious choirs of multitracked female voices as if to demonstrate his hard-won liberation from the ego-prisons of taking oneself too literally ("I see my life in full review…it was never me, it was always you" he intones on the ridiculously exciting swanker "There For You"). Elsewhere we find the great sage veering into spoken-word territory- check out "Morning Glory" or "Villanelle For Our Time" for a reminder that our man began his performance career reciting hip poetry among 50s jazzers- the former, in particular, swings like a bitch as two Cohens ponder the plausibility of sudden heavenly illumination (which shows up at precisely the right moment in fabulous mimesis of satori). If these oddball lovelies don't moisten your chapped punani, download the title track into your heart-drive: a kind of robot haiku, it consists entirely of Cohen and Anjani Thomas repeatedly reciting the lyric like Stephen Hawking duetting with his nurse. "Dear Heather", they flatly enunciate. "Please walk by me again / With a drink in your hand / And your legs all white from the winter". This over a rinky-dink organ suggestive of cartoon drunks or baby giraffes. So perfectly childlike it's almost senile (or vice versa), it's a measure of the man's enduring genius that (for this listener at least) this 'song' is the most eloquently libidinous paean to an unrequited hard-on ever committed to digital storage media.

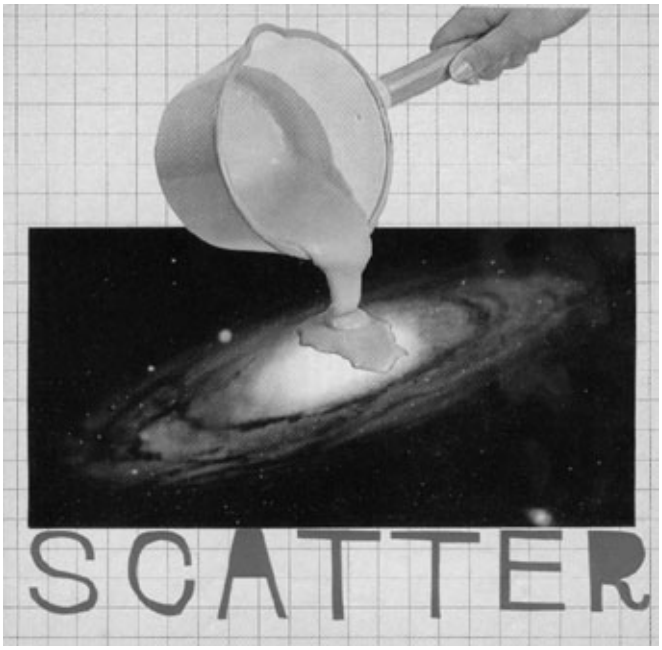
I could go on, but hopefully you're getting the picture. *Dear Heather*'s a bleeding masterpiece. It sounds like nothing else, not even previous Leonard Cohen records.

Buy it.

JONATHAN HELLIER
www.leonardcohen.com
www.columbiarecords.com
www.dearheather.com

Scatter
Surprising Sing Stupendous Love
UNITED KINGDOM PICKLED EGG RECORDINGS EGG52 CD (2003)

Not at all what I was expecting from the packaging- an ugly on-the-cheap collage that screams 'YOU WON'T ENJOY THIS'- I found, to my surprise, that I enjoy it very much. It's not the art-for-art's-sake chimera my preconceptions had led me to fear. Now I feel quite humbled. Had I really grown so cynical, so sated with the idea of 'weird' music that the mere thought of another sixty minutes of foggy, ill-conceived crapola was enough to make me run away to Thailand, undergo a backstreet penidectomy and see out my days whimpering beneath the clumsy bumstabs of Australian sex-tourists? No, but I had grown *quite* cynical, I'm sorry to say. This dear little record, while not powerful or good enough to redeem my wasted life, has at least afforded me a frisson of



yummy meaning in a world smelling increasingly of sick. A concatenation of Scottish musicians exploring what it's like to set music 'free', Scatter take us to a warm-hearted place where everyone's welcome so long as they're willing to participate in generating some old-fashioned good vibes. There's no hierarchy or dull-ass pecking order here- just grab yourself a bowl of lentil and chickpea ooze, do your best to blow, bash or pluck something that makes noises, pass that hemp cigarette to the girl with whom you hope to enjoy messy, unprotected sex later, and hey! you've been Scatter-ed. It really is that easy. After a couple of immersions in this aural funclub, I feel as though I'm in the band too!

A kind of loosely-premeditated improvisation, recorded "over a wet May bank holiday weekend 2003" by the protean Brendan O'Hare, *Surprising Sing Stupendous Love* is Dionysiac in tone, unashamed to embrace the body, good to dance to, ethnically inclusive, well-versed in certain musical traditions without being traditional per se, refreshingly free of polemic, willing to laugh at itself, eager to revere the simplicity of cosmic awareness, hard enough not to tolerate your bullshit a moment longer. I'm useless at comparisons because I don't spend my time licking my gigantic record collection to orgasm, but if I said it sounds a bit like some Alice Coltrane record I haven't heard, would I be so very far from the mark? Methinks no. Sun Ra and his Arkestra also: *merde*, there's a track here ("Adventure-Equation") wot's actually a Sun Ra cover, boys and girls! And it's beautiful, beautiful in the same vein as its bedfellows- sprouting organically from a wet cascade of bass, fertilised by hairy plops of percussion, one can actually hear the piece drinking music from the fingertips of its creators and swelling into colourful etiolations, petalled asymmetries of magic vivacity. Horns and flutes dump protein into burgeoning grooves and fatten them up. A sense of well-being and basic faith in the universe becomes difficult to suppress. Yes, I like this funny, eccentric post-jazz / space-folk / commune-psych / African-hillbilly-gypsy thang you do, darling Scatter. I like the effortless fusion of earth and sky you realise, the underlying presence of AUM, the Krishna chops of your flautist, the sensuality of horn and saxophone as they work me up to my freakout (which is inevitable). Zigzagging the crest of your parping riffs across coconut-strewn rivers makes me feel like a shy child riding a two-headed star-donkey through Rio during carnival. Made in *Glasgow*? You fucking liars.

JONATHAN HELLIER
Pickled Egg Records, PO Box 6944, Leicester LE2 0WL
www.pickled-egg.co.uk

Beth Anderson

Peachy Keen-O

USA POGUS PRODUCTIONS P21030-2 CD (2003)

Truly startling *objet d'haine*. Quite terrifying, actually. Its malevolence makes my skin crawl. No, I'm not joking. There's evil herein. Ever heard any really *eeeeeevil* recordings? Shit, baby, of course you have- this is *The Sound Projector*- each issue features a few, right? Well this is the nastiest I've reviewed so far. N for neurotic. A for aaaaargh. S for "Stop!" T for torment. Y for yes, I hate it.

Now, I used to think *Electric Storm* by the White Noise was evil; or the first Suicide LP; or the Beach Boys' *Wild Honey* (man, do I hear the devil in this record). They pale into complete insignificance compared to (I'm crossing myself as I type) *Peachy Keen-O*, within which lurks a composite intelligence bent on perverting the unwary and yellowing the innocent into jaundiced abysses of absolute wickedness. Don't scoff! I was sent to warn you- you *must* trust me. Oh sure, we can all make lists of our favourite 'evil' recordings, but the kind of sleazy, insinuatory poisoning-of-all-you-hold-dear (from which I strive, as your hero, to protect you) won't be found among black-metal guitar-blasphemies or up the lubed anus of this month's homophobic ragga shouter. That stuff is kids' play. Do we really believe the dark mouth of Hell opens every time some drongo inverts a crucifix? Wouldn't Satan be embarrassed to associate with the self-aggrandising prickless fools who fart their bling across the coffins of hiphop? Brothers and sisters, to *really* smell that sulphur and feel the cold tread of fear across your palpitating hearts, you must look to….the meeting point between 70s electro-acoustic experimentation and 'text-sound' as exemplified by the work of Beth Anderson. For at this nebulous junction, your slow death awaits you.

Text-sound. Seems innocuous enough? Using "words and phonemes to make a kind of vocal-percussive music"? Don't believe the press-release hype. 'Using guttural syllables in diabolic collage to induce involuntary regression and reanimate savage atavisms' might be a truer confession of Beth Anderson's cruel mission-statement. Cursory investigation into her background suggests she's an avant-garde composer of some repute- studied with John Cage, Terry Riley, etc- and a nice enough person I'm sure, but even nice people do terrible things sometimes, and this collection of her work between 1973-79 is terrible indeed. It's not so much that the 'music' is difficult to get with: sometimes difficulty ends up being the very thing we freaks enjoy the most about our 'experimental' favourites. No, it's worse than that. *These tracks are surely implements of soul-torture*. One doesn't so much listen to as become infected by them. Internalise something as snidely sadistic as, say, track four, "Ocean Motion Mildew Mind" and you will never know peace again. The author describes it as "a Punk realisation of 'ommm'". It is not. Om (or Aum) is the Word of God underlying all manifestation. "Ocean Motion Mildew Mind" is the sound of a woman with too much time on her hands chanting repetitive gibberish over a beatbox so crap that for the rest of my life I will (in some fervent corner of oneiric imagination) be smashing it to pieces with an axe. And every track is similarly foul. I'm not going to name them all because I wouldn't want to pique your curiosity and see you killed. The most honest pig-demon in this basket of madness is called

"I Can't Stand It", under whose dominion Anderson attempts to purge herself of the evil she's unleashed as jungle drums circle like vultures around the dying bison of her sanity and she screams, "I can't stand it! Can't stand it! Can't say it! Won't do it! Can't read it! I won't go! I won't talk! I won't eat! *I just can't stand it!*"

This record will never let me go, never.

JONATHAN HELLIER
Pogus Productions, 50 Ayr Road, Chester NY 10918 USA
pogal@pogus.com
www.pogus.com

Chlorgeschlecht
Unyoga
FRANCE DECO DECO004 CD (2003)

Unbearable and delightful in roughly equal measure, I'm pleased to report this is nothing but sheerly ugly, punch-you-in-the-face barbarism just like Mum used to make. Back on terra firma with this kind of racket, I feel I know where I stand with these guys- they hate me- and that's just dandy! You'll love it too- gather round and warm those fingers frozen by too much fiddling in the liquid nitrogen of conceptual sound-art! There's certainly nothing here to tax your cerebrum or make demands on your shrivelled old heart, it's just ear-splitting filth with no cultural significance whatsoever- totally ephemeral- shit, Chlorgeschlecht have probably forgotten they made it already- hence, very safe. I'd recommend it for the under-fives.

A little over twenty-five minutes long, this thing called *Unyoga* is taut, tight but never trite. It's like baby's first primer in computer / sampler / guitar-generated abstract noise, kindergarten Merzbow but with added Germanness. Tracks? They all sort of blur into one (got some great titles though: "Vomity Breathy", "Crack Bitch", "Ach, Hermann Schleisser", yo! Even bothering to name these minute-long epileptic seizures is something to be applauded) as we chart the 'progress' of the various strangling, grunting, scalding and prickling sounds that constitute the backbone of this wankscape. The best is saved until last: the gloriously-titled "Release That Ibiza Feeling", more or less an encapsulation of everything that makes this record grate. Wet mouthy-noises, some beats, a telephone ringing, a breathless man running to answer it, then demented screaming in very angry German as he hammers a door and/or some furniture and/or someone's contorted, hate-filled face, all doused in acidic machine-sperm. Humiliating, depressing and very wrong. You're sure to like it.

'Yoga' meaning 'union', do you suppose the title of the piece is intended to allude to a sort of fractious, fally-aparty way of being? Mmm, hold that thought, I don't want to know. If I thought about it this record too much it might spoil it for me. Concept-swallowing is something I just won't do unless I feel really valued and respected, and the relationship is something we're both committed to for the long term. Whereas I'll probably never think about Chlorgeschlecht again once I've finished writing this, the single most incisive, sympathetic and relevant piece of critique anyone will ever afford them. Boys, are you listening? Your wecord weally wocks my world.

JONATHAN HELLIER
chlor@unyoga.com
www.unyoga.com/chlor
www.w-deco.com

Tom Hamilton
London Fix
USA MUSE EEK MSK118 CD (2003)

'Wahey', thought I on first inspection of this very yellow package. 'More. Of. This. Kind. Of. Thing. Then.' Stick it on. Sit. Wait. Peruse the sleeve (…yellow). *London Fix*. "Music changing with the price of gold". I see. Hark! There's a muted electronic babbling where a moment ago there was silence. Ok. Turn to information on inner sleeve. Of course. *We got us a Concept!!!* I might have guessed.

Allow me to quote from the liner notes of Tom Hamilton, composer:

"This music follows the contours of the spot gold market as defined by the twice-daily London Fix. I used the 12 monthly price charts of 2002 to animate an electronic pitch-making system of my own design, mapping the charts to control individual pitch possibilities, range and even portamento (perhaps a slight nod to the violin). Facilitated by Michael J Schumacher's computer programming, I used the historical chart data both in a linear and recursive fashion, resulting in sonic fluctuations that compress and superimpose time in a way that discourages any literal interpretation. Being interested in a particular musical end, simple representation has less appeal (to me) than the counterpoint resulting from simultaneity".

Oh me too, love, me too. Simple representation is *so* over, we all need to put it behind us and get on with our lives. Thanks for being brave enough to lead by example with this hour-long bloopfest!

Not unlike entering an episode of *Doctor Who* and wandering in goggle-eyed awe around an eerily-abandoned control room aboard the Cyberman battle-freighter orbiting 25th century Earth, this recording goes bleepy-bloopy-bleep in a manner suggestive of computer-controlled environments in the far-flung future as imagined by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop during 1970s-80s. The sleevenotes advise 'please play softly': I did the opposite, wrenching up the volume and filling my igloo with fat white stalactites of sound. This felt good. I knew I could dance very strangely to this funny, blind music (if I dared), crawling sideways down the stairs and spinning ketamine webs from my bottom. You could too- *London Fix* does all the hard work for you.

If silence is water (…bear with me…), minimalist sound-environments are flavoured cordial- add one to the other for a bit of variety. It's not really music to be *listened* to. You could, in fact, play something you like on a different sound-system while allowing *London Fix* to tinkle away in the background: a harmless alternative to your natural environmental sounds; an aural houseplant.

JONATHAN HELLIER

Muse-Eek Publishing, PO Box 509, New York NY 10276 USA
www.muse-eek.com
www.london-fix.com

Various Artists
Tryptaphonic Mind Explosion: Sounds From The Psychedelic Noise Underground
USA MANDRAGORA RECORDS MR011 CD (2002)

Kidney-bitingly cool comp from the marvellous Mandragora Records. Acquire it and recoil to encounter twelve varieties of undead, each different in form but unified in their fervent desire to drag you down to their level and snigger while God damns you repeatedly for having such good taste. Did you remember to wash your sexual parts in a virgin's tears? Have you abstained from antheomorphropansophophophy? Then tightly grip your angel and let us proceed…

Surely there's no-one on earth who doesn't dream of the psychedelic noise underground? Willing the bastard thing to exist? Like you or someone you know, I once was brain-raped by Blue Cheer as I pigged out on Throbbing Gristle, and I felt a dark fusion transpire inside me; the idea that psychedelia could be noise and noise could be psychedelia (instead of just noise) took form and fed on my blood, until I grew fat with it; spurred on by screaming Japanese midwives, my disbelieving flaps dilated and I pushed hard like a good girl. But nothing emerged: the yearned-for progeny refused to incarnate. Until now? Weeeeell…yes and no. Despite its high enjoyment factor, there's still something not quite ready, not quite full-term about this sinister collection of drone-metal and après-Kraut chic. Every track's at least quite good, a few are truly top-hole, but the central thesis remains underdeveloped, and too often I feel one can perceive the hastily-stitched joins between, say, 'rock' music and its darker corollary (for which 'psychedelic noise' must suffice as a name- although in truth it has no name). I mean, I'm being picky. If you like

hopelessly stoned-out heavy dirges *sans* tune (as I do), you're in for a treat! There are lots here. Some will hit you from many directions at once, crumpling your fussy genre-distinctions into a bloody ball in a bona fide psychedelic-noise embolism. Others talk the talk but don't quite walk the walk. These remain of minor interest to all but the most fuzz-starved energy-beggar, so tracks by Mandog, Escapade, Paradise Camp 23, At The Eat and Delayed Sleep- all of you- shit off back to Nowheresville and do steroids.

As for the rest, it's full-on my-dead's-deader-than-your-dead deadness. 'AHHHHHUUUWA-OO-WAA-OO-WAAAAHHHONGGGG' goes Robot vs Rabbit's epochal "Not Shiny", the sonic equivalent of a policeman's truncheon smashing over yr skull, breaking it into pieces and liberating the exact same cloud of half-dead butterflies released over Hyde Park by the Rolling Stones in 1969. Then there's "Rosewood Frog with Serbian Eye" by Interferents, some sort of "band" from Brooklyn (don't think I mentioned, it's a pan-global line-up on this CD- acts from USA, Japan, Finland and Argentina) cooking up an atonal, spastic stumble through foggy migraines so completely bereft of hope as to dissuade Jesus from his resurrection. *Disco!* No sooner have you fought off this shambler then *cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!* It's thirteen past forever and time for Pine Tree State Mind Control to lurk outside your school and sell you drugs, which you consume obediently only to fly home and find both parents have turned into witches. Strong stuff, huh? Glad you stuck around? Yeah, me too, just a shame the otherness-level can't be maintained for the duration of the trip- some tracks dip the intensity several notches and my rational mind comes clanking in like Dad's rubbish android. No such qualms with Acid Mothers Temple & The Melting Paraiso UFO or Reynols, however, whose back-to-back assault with (respectively) "Spaced Out" and "Un Tiermo Exsina Concinado Cahubo de lo Panso Y Ronil Fermo Acarriones Nindio lor Minecxio Alcalpulco Moros" is about where this journey peaks. The former a patented kitchen-sink style slice of fucked-up Hawkwind with added everything, the latter seemingly a soundtrack to the inner life of zombies (featureless zones of endless grey; shuffling rhythm; animal moaning), between them they're squeezing the life out of me. You could do worse than to buy this thing if only to check out my putrefying corpse sandwiched between tracks 7 and 8.

JONATHAN HELLIER

Mandragora Records, PO Box 396, Northampton, MA 01061 USA
info@mandragora.com
www.mandragora.com

Elliott Smith
From a Basement on the Hill
USA DOMINO RECORDS WIGCD147 CD (2004)

Elliott Smith was a Portland-based singer-songwriter who made a succession of astonishing records between 1994 and the century's turn, culminating in the multidimensional orchestrated psychedelia of 2000's *Figure 8*; after which, things went quiet as he toiled on the follow-up; then, suddenly, the announcement of his suicide in October 2003; one year later, the posthumous emergence of *From a Basement on the Hill* is greeted with unanimous critical hosannas. Cementing his reputation as being pretty much better than the Beatles by whom he was so clearly inspired, it's the kind of rock record everyone thought nobody made any more. And now, sadly, nobody does. What would've been an effervescently brilliant new album from one of the very few songwriters under forty worth anything at all has been eerily magnified and deepened by the artist's death. It now stands alongside Alexander Spence's *Oar*, David Crosby's *If I Could Only Remember My Name*, Chris Bell's *I Am The Cosmos* (to name but three) as a Janus-faced sentinel, gazing into our world with boundless compassion even as it turns away from us to face the unknowable Beyond. It's an album rich with secrets, whispers, intimacies, unbearable beauty and colossal suffering. It's a map bequeathed us by a reluctant explorer, showing us how to proceed past the point at which all other maps fail. It's a friend in whose company we can never grow old, never demean our true worth, never compromise our innate authenticity. Seriously life-changing shit. Robbie Williams it ain't.

How to describe to you a work of art to which your scribe has only been able to respond emotionally, with tears, gasps of it's-too-much awe, wish-I-was-this-cool fantasies and intense meditative reveries on the nature of self, soul, life, death, beauty and pain? Truth be told, my critical faculties break down when I dig something this much. It moves me to want to sing, paint, kiss people; to make divine love to all creation, to give every atom of my being in endless rainbow convulsions of service. God, life is so beautiful. Even the pain. It all has its place in this most holy of universes. Friends, we're *alive*, eternally *alive*, each of us outshining the sun in taintless perfection even as we endure the masque of human frailty, with all its attendant downers. Strange that it's the final testament of a depressive, suicidal junkie responsible for flinging open the doors of my heart in this manner. But then, isn't it strange that he or I or any of us are not here, then here, then not here again? Not to find something strange is not to be paying attention!

What Smith did was to invent a parallel pop-wonderland wherein John Lennon and George Harrison were the songwriting partnership in the Beatles, who began with the *White Album*, moved through *Abbey Road* (skipping *Let It Be* along the way) and into pastures undreamed-of by the 70s power-popsters and symphonic proglodytes who were the historically chronological inheritors of said quartet's lush production chops and melodic-harmonic nous. This calling is evident throughout his work, building to a flaming apotheosis of godlike genius on *From a Basement…*, a fantastic tangle of candy-acid hooklines, mouthwateringly sour chord progressions and mindfucking special effects from start to finish, all topped off with vocal arrangements to send Brian Wilson scuttling back to his sandpit. For an 'unfinished' album it certainly sounds massive, glossy and sure of itself. Split pretty much evenly between acoustic intimacy and fuck-off wall-of-sound psych-rock, it displays Smith's effusion of talent from every possible angle- "written, performed, produced and recorded by Elliott Smith" declares the sleeve- good God, was there anything this man couldn't do? Well, yes unfortunately- he clearly had trouble with the whole "will to live" thing so crucial to maintaining biological existence, as evinced by his long-term battles with heroin addiction and alcoholism. Much of the lyrical content of this last work reflects his drug-exacerbated state of intense self-loathing. It doesn't make for cheerful listening as he spells out his terminal ennui with the amused detachment of a man already resigned to violent death by his own hand: by the time we reach track 13, "Memory Lane", the juxtaposition of jaunty bluegrass melody and the lament of someone "absolutely horrified" by their descent into "self-hatred, guilt and shame" is profoundly disquieting. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry at the savagery of Smith's irony. I don't think he knew how to make sense of it either.

Yet the clear light of transcendence radiates from a deep place within this work, and for all its sorrow and morbidity it's ultimately a redemptive vision on offer here. Such is the prescience of these songs in foreshadowing their author's demise, his intuitive grasp of psychedelia so total and masterly, it's almost as if he's singing them to us from beyond the grave, his consciousness refracted now through the fragments of himself he left behind. How else to approach tracks like "Little One" (unbearably lovely suicide-note) or the stupefying "King's Crossing", a damn-near-perfect snapshot of Smith's own death-process encapsulated in five minutes' worth of just about the best pop music I've ever heard? These are the moments when he and we go together to a place beyond music, beyond artist-and-audience, where the boundaries between life and death are dissolved and we all commingle beneath the fountainheads of spirit, our immortality made shockingly tangible.

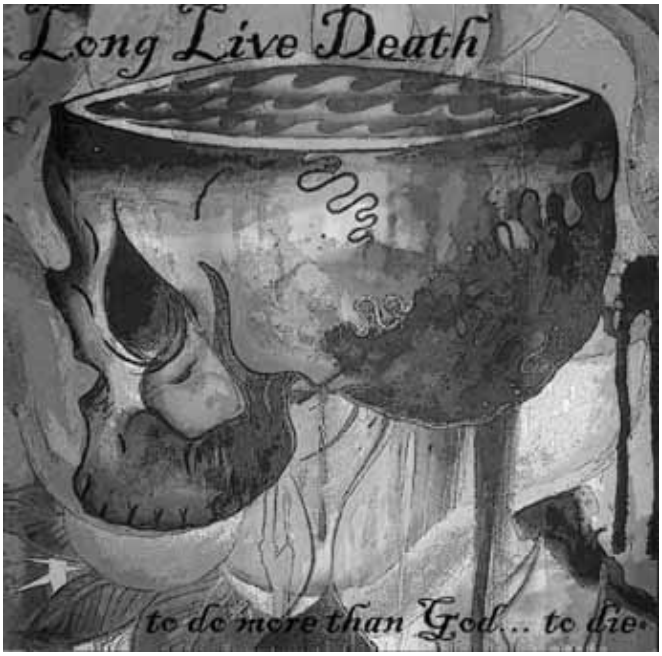
Let's all buy this record and afford Elliott Smith some love and understanding. When you hear it, you'll understand it can never be too late to proffer these holy gifts.

JONATHAN HELLIER

Domino Recording Co Ltd, PO Box 47029, London SW18 1WD
www.dominorecordco.com
www.sweetadeline.net (Elliott Smith fan site)

Long Live Death
To Do More Than God…To Die
USA SECRET EYE AB-OC-07 CD (2003)

The Birdtree
Orchards and Caravans
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD #041 CD (2003)



You'll have heard all about the renaissance in what can broadly be termed 'psychedelic folk' music in recent years: call it free folk, 'new weird America' (eurgh, only if you must), you probably know a shitload more about it than me. Gee-whizz, I'm so outta touch I only heard Davendra Banhart about six months ago, and now he's more famous than Mick Jagger. I dig Pearls Before Swine, Donovan, Richard Thompson, Comus, Incredible String Band, Meic Stevens, Vashti Bunyan, sure; is this what people mean when they froth gleefully about hairy tribes of oud-plucking freaks descending from the hills to liberate us from the tyrannical clutches of corporate music-making and distribution? No, it can't be. Aforementioned ancients left us artefacts powerful enough to continue liberating minds forever (*Sunshine Superman*, *Outlander*, *Henry the Human Fly*, all will sound splendid to swinging hep-cats in 20,004 AD) but themselves have no direct bearing upon this thing we're all rushing to label (and besides, much of the old stuff has also enjoyed the opportunity to bask in the media's fickle spotlight in recent times, as evinced by comps like Castle's *Gather In The Mushrooms*). Yada yada yada. Your slave will bore you no longer with his wack attempts to provide a context for the risible *faux-naif* verbiage to follow shortly. This is what's really happening: I'm going to play two compact discs, by artists of whom I know nothing, and then I'm going to tell you if I like them or not. That's it.

Ostensibly I'm reviewing these two together because they're both new, weird (well, sort of) and American, so I thought I could thematically tie these qualities in with all the stuff that (other) people (not me) are saying about, you know, Sunburned Hand of the Man and their ilk. Also because Secret Eye and Last Visible Dog are both labels associated with this kind of music. And also because I'm lazy, it's Christmas Eve and once I've finished doing this I'm off to get joylessly drunk in an attempt to forget life's terror.

Moving swiftly on, I give you- Long Live Death, and their six-track twenty-five-minuter *To Do More Than God... To Die*. Cover depicts hollowed-out skull in delicious greens and pinks, package suggests a kind of gothic, wyrd-folk, Current 93 agenda is to be mooted. But package tells lies. Reviews quoted on website say "neo-Pagan flavour", "kitchen-sink surrealism", "wondrously composed folk-flecked ballads". But website tells lies also. Apologies to any among you who may have resolved to commit suicide if this record turns out to be anything less than *thee* grimoire of angelic magick-in-sound promised you by the wise old man in your recurring dream, *but*- it sounds like demos for the next REM album. What I do hear: cello, gong, flute, accordion, guitar, percussion, vocals (competent), melodies (uninspired), repetition (automatic), slavish adherence to already-moribund formula (unfortunate). What I don't hear: originality, energy, acid, shamanic double-vision, trance-ecstasy, tongues, a reason for listening, sitar (always a disappointment when there's no sitar). I'm sorry, Long Live Death, but I'm not impressed. Taking no joy in slagging off someone's effort into which they've obviously poured their resources and we-really-mean-it intent, I'm duty-bound to report that this sucks. Since it's Christmas, let's be charitable and suggest that subsequent releases by this Baltimore-based collective might turn out ok if they take a load more drugs in the meantime.

Next! Ah, the Birdtree. Come in, boy. Stand there, in front of my desk. Hmmm, let's see. Birdtree, Birdtree, Birdtree… of San Franciscan origin…goes under alias of 'Glenn Donaldson'… associated with freethinking subversives in Jewelled Antler collective… impeccable academic record, and your housemaster has told me you're quite the dab-hand when it comes to majestic pastoral psychedelia- why, he even suggested you stand comparison with alumni such as Ghost and Flying Saucer Attack! Have you been secretly fellating him, Birdtree? Ahahaha, no need to look so bashful, boy- just my little joke! *Orchards and Caravans*, eh? Let's see what all the fuss is about…

Crack-my-frigid-veneer-with-Thor's-hammer, it's pretty bloody good actually. Does what it says on the box. With titles like "White Sundials Faced the Sun", "Red Midnight Raven", "Scorpions and Lions" and (my favourite) "The Bluish Vapor of Tall Eucalyptus Trees", one anticipates immersion in a mythic, hallucinatory reality and concourse with its denizens. Happily, Donaldson delivers nuances of bent time and fuzz-omelettes so apropos to dream journeying that I for one have no problem squeezing the blue whale of my boredom aboard his guiTARDIS (bigger inside than out) for a trip to Planet Introvert.

Bouzouki, banjo, bells, oud, harmonium, various keyboards, guitar, "pink fuzz" and "cassettes"- a modishly bohemian toybox, to be sure, but not gratuitously so- the mixture of ethnic/acoustic, kiddie/retro and archetypally 'rock' instrumentation allows this music the space it requires to breathe and glisten. Most of these tracks are recognisably 'songs', with

(at least a cursory nod toward) structure, internal melodic logic, words, a singer etc. And some very good songs, too: reminiscent (for me) of some of Robert Pollard's more fractured, experimental solo recordings, I also discern echoes of Roky Erikson, Richard Youngs, Damon & Naomi. Neither the songwriting nor the production is big on climaxes or dramatic scene-changes, but the energy and interest that keep you listening come from elsewhere, some sidereal place running parallel with the linear timestream which makes its presence felt in cold streams of reverb and the gummy suction of drones and 'found' sounds. These 'incidental' noises seem to constitute a kind of *prima materia* from which song-fragments briefly individuate, acting out some archetypal dynamic of loss and longing before reabsorbtion into the great Mother. The cumulative effect is pleasing and certainly conducive to soulmaking. I enjoy it sufficiently to acknowledge that, on this basis, the Jewelled Antler thingy to which the Birdtree is affiliated is a likely source for more quality contemporary soft-psych.

Must say, doesn't strike me as having much to do with folk music though. All that burningly-honest preamble I went through, now it seems I'm left with egg on my face. *Somebody tell me what to think!!!*

JONATHAN HELLIER

Secret Eye, PO Box 170, Barrington RI 02806 USA
web@secreteye.org
www.secreteye.org
www.longlivedeath.net
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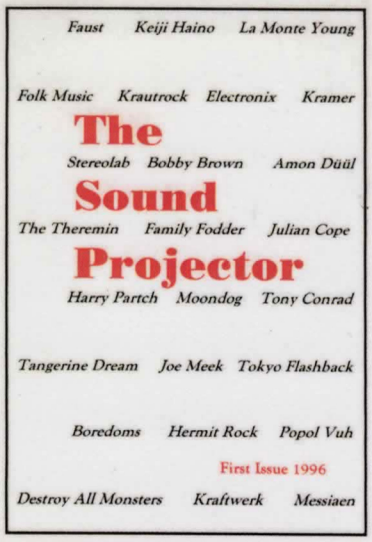

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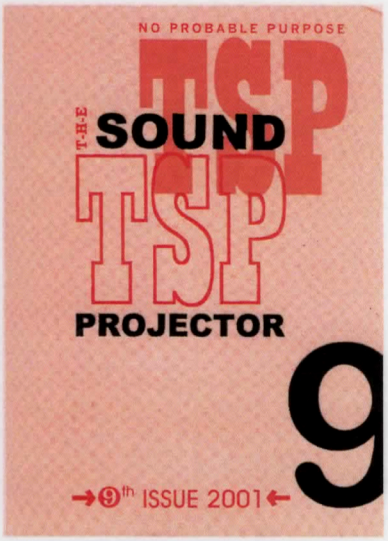

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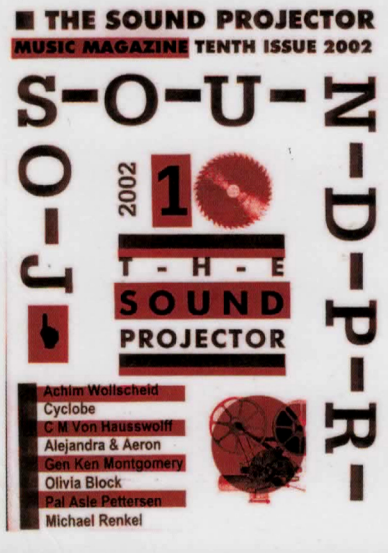

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BM BEMUSED
LONDON
WC1N 3XX
UNITED KINGDOM
www.thesoundprojector.com